

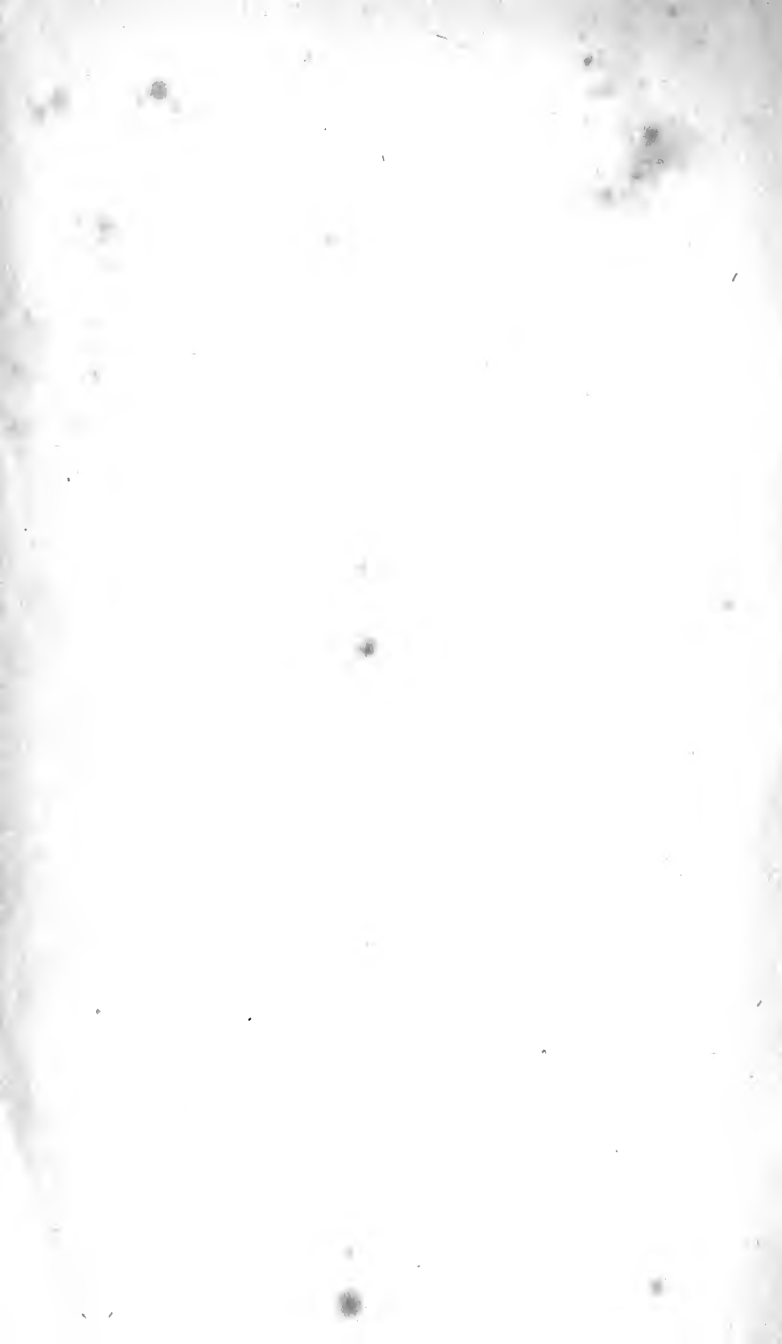


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JANITA'S CROSS.

VOL. III.

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JANITA'S CROSS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S.”

“Work and wait.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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JANITA'S CROSS.

CHAPTER I.



THAT was the aristocratic side of Meadowthorpe on the wedding day. But a very different sort of life, quite as merry, though not perhaps so well behaved, was going on in the Hall field, where seventy or eighty of the Duke's men, with Mr. Andrews as president, were regaling themselves with the new steward's roast beef and plum pudding, and drinking the bride's health in brimming tankards of home-brewed, where also Peter Monk, who had walked down from his lodging in St. Olave's that morning, was prowling round the tent, peeping through little chinks in the canvas, and trying to find out who was there. For that was a day on which old grudges were laid aside,

and though Peter could not join the banquet—that being confined to the Duke’s men—yet no one made any objection to his sharing in the field sports, so long as he conducted himself properly. Roy, safe inside the tent, listening to the speeches, and perhaps mentally composing his own—for Mr. Andrews had told him that he would be “called upon”—knew nothing of the enemy without, the wolf that was watching its opportunity to spring.

Most of the Gentility Square servants had a holiday for the wedding afternoon. Miss Hepzibah had given Abigail and Bessie leave to go out as soon as their work was done, and stay until nine o’clock, which would allow them time for a few dances, as that part of the amusement was to commence soon after tea.

You may be sure a great process of dressing and beautifying took place that afternoon in the white-washed attic at the top of Professor Ruthven’s house. Bessie got her dinner, Bedouin fashion, in bits and scraps whilst she washed up the glasses; and then she flew up stairs to secure an hour’s undisturbed possession of the looking-glass before Abigail, who was more leisurely in her movements, would be ready to begin toilet operations. And

how pleasantly that hour sped, only those know who have rosy cheeks, and bright, wavy hair, and pretty eyes with long black lashes to them like Bessie's; and whose social opportunities, too, like hers, are confined to quarterly afternoons out, or chance holidays which come like angel visits, few and far between.

There is no need to enlarge upon all Bessie's little manipulations that afternoon. No need to tell how often she braided and unbraided the long tresses of her back hair before the plaits would be got to lie in just the right position; nor how many times the ringlets which shaded her round cheeks had to be recurled before she could make them fall properly without those ugly little rough ends which looked so untidy; nor how much care was needed to smooth the glossy ripple on each side of her white forehead and fasten down any stray loose hairs with a home-made preparation answering to bandoline, which she kept locked up in her wooden trunk out of reach of Abigail's prying eyes. Those who have pretty faces know all about such manipulations, those who have not will not care to be reminded of them. When all was done she got a sixpenny looking-glass out of her box

and placed it and the other one so that she could command a prospect of her side face.

The prospect must have been a pleasant one, for Bessie loitered over it so long that she had scarcely time to thrust the glass back into the box before Abigail, puffing and panting, and looking very bad-tempered, came up stairs to go through the very needful process of "cleaning herself." Poor Abigail, who had spent a full hour the night before in curling her scant tow-coloured hair all the way round, except a little bit on each side her forehead, which she plaited very tight, in order that when it was let out next afternoon, it might be "all of a pucker in and out" like Bessie's. When it was undone it did indeed prove to be "all of a pucker," but not at all such a pretty pucker as Bessie's, which made the plain cook worse tempered than before, and she resolved in her own mind that she never would take a place again where there was such a pretty young woman as Bessie Ashton, it brought nothing but disagreeableness.

Poor Abigail! Yet some one there was in Meadowthorpe who had a soft place in his heart for Miss Hepzibah's cook. Barnie Wilson's son

Jem, a fat young man with red hair, a red face, and a large mouth that was always open, had been "partic'lar friendly of a late," and had set her home from church three times running, besides squeezing her hand, and saying what he meant to do next Valentine's Day. And Abigail was quite sure something would come of it. Jem could "sattle" whenever he chose, for he had good wages in the Duke's forge, to say nothing of a little private trade which he carried on in the poultry line. Maybe she might be as well off as Bessie after all. Maybe a great deal better off.

Bessie Ashton made a very pretty picture as she came out of the wooden gate in the wall that afternoon, and looked up and down the road for Roy, who had promised to be ready for her at three o'clock. The lilac muslin frock fitted to a nicety, and so did the mantle of the same stuff, finished off at the throat with her new collar and the spray of roses which Roy had brought her from his father's garden—the last that he would gather there. And that plain white Dunstable bonnet, it only cost half-a-crown at the first, and had been "done up" two or three times, yet no Bond Street milliner could have contrived a head-

dress to suit more perfectly the pretty face beneath it. And when young Roy, who had been waiting for her more than half an hour at the cottage door, came and put her arm in his to take her to the field, he felt as proud of his betrothed as even Colonel Gore could be of the graceful bride, who, robed in silk and cashmere, had just stepped into her coronetted carriage.

Everyone knew now that she was engaged to Roy, and that the affair would come off very soon, so Bessie was not ashamed to be seen walking with him in broad daylight, walking arm-in-arm, too; just as they hoped to walk all their lives. Indeed, she was very happy that afternoon. She knew she was pretty and nicely dressed, and that in itself was quite enough to produce a pleasurable state of mind; more especially as there were so many people to look at her, not servant girls like herself and young men out of the village only, but real ladies, people from Gentility Square, and the better class houses at the upper end of Meadowthorpe, who had come into the Hall field to watch the games. Bessie knew very well that any of the pale-faced, freckled Miss Narrowbys would have given pounds and pounds for a pair of rosy cheeks like her own, or

a forehead as white as that which was shaded by her rippling dark hair. And she knew too, that the scranny, square-shouldered Aubrey House ladies would cheerfully have parted with one of their best china jars, or even a century or two of their Norman pedigree, for a figure so rounded and graceful, or arms so well shaped as hers. Bessie Ashton was neither shallow nor vain, there was real honest truth down in the heart of her ; but yet she did like to walk about amongst the people, arm-in-arm with Roy, and feel that they were turning round to look at her, and whispering now and then to each other, something about her clear complexion, or her dark hair, or her nice figure. I do not think she was a less true woman for enjoying this. I do not think she would make Roy a less faithful wife, when once she had laid her hand in his, and taken him for better for worse, because now she blushed for pleasure at the admiring glances which were cast upon her, or felt a shy gladness in the knowledge that she was so fair.

They had been watching the games for nearly an hour, not joining in them though ; for Bessie wanted to keep her dress nice and clean, ready for the dancing. Roy little knew that all the time

Peter Monk had been having his eye upon them, watching them unseen as he dodged about behind the trunks and quickset hedges. If he had known that, he would not have left Bessie, no, not for one moment.

"I must be like to go now, Bessie," he said, as the church clock struck three; "but I shan't be very long. I'm only going to help 'em a bit up yonder at the Hall. Mr. Rivers asked me if I'd give a hand to fix the evergreens and things ready for the ball, he wants 'em done like those the men and me fixed last night. So I'll come back to you after tea, and then we'll have a dance, afore it's time for you to set off home. Maybe you'd like to go with me though, and get a sight o' the grand company folks?"

"No, thank you. I don't care to see 'em partic'lar," said Bessie, who preferred conjugating the verb "to admire" in its passive form; it was better to be belle of the field, than looker-on at the Hall. So Roy left her, and she seated herself on an old oak stump, near to a bench where Abigail and her open-mouthed swain were enjoying a little friendly conversation.

Bessie was not suffered to remain long alone.

By and by young Alick came up, dressed in his best, looking very brisk and handsome. He would fain have conducted her round the field to see the sport, but Bessie did not care for the sport ; and after playing the agreeable for a little while, blind man's buff proved too powerful an attraction for Alick, and he assigned his post to Mark Brayson, the constable's son, who sung bass in the church choir. Mark was no favourite of Bessie's. She gave him such cold looks and curt replies and took so little pains to make herself agreeable, that the poor young man went away in despair, feeling as if he had been hardly used. He kept his eye upon her however, during the evening, a fact which Bessie found out afterwards to her cost. When he was gone, the red-faced butler came and said a few polite things, in his solid pompous fashion ; then the tall footman, then Mr. Andrews himself, which made Bessie feel very proud. But she hoped the clerk of the works would not notice her new muslin frock, and think it too extravagant for Roy's wife.

After Mr. Andrews went away, she sat alone for some time. No other admirers made their appearance. The field sports were going on with great animation, everyone appeared to be joining in

or watching them, except a few little boys and girls who were unable to force their way through the ring of spectators, and so amused themselves by playing at hop-scotch and leap-frog on the smooth grass beside her. Bessie began to think she might as well take a quiet walk down the haling-bank to meet Roy on his way back from the Hall, when a very, *very* yellow glove was laid on her shoulder, and some one behind her said—

“Good afternoon, Miss Ashton. I have been wanting to make myself known to you for some time, but the belle of the field has so many admirers, that she cannot spare a glance for an old friend.”

Bessie thought she ought to know that voice. The tones were familiar enough, but the accent was so changed that she had to turn round before she could be sure to whom it belonged. And then Peter Monk's eyes were bent upon her with a look of undisguised admiration, which made her colour deeply.

Monk was very much altered. Three or four months in a west-end tailoring establishment had made quite a fine gentleman of him. Bessie was almost overpowered when she gained self-possession enough to look up and take a more leisurely

survey of her old friend the engine-man. The first thing that arrested her attention was a bright blue silk cravat, so much brighter and bluer than anything Roy ever wore, fastened with a great gold pin, such a pin both for size and brilliance as Bessie had never seen before, either in church or anywhere else. A thick chain dangled outside his waistcoat; his shirt-collar, very stiff and of a quite new cut, was covered all over with a pattern of dogs' heads, and so were the wristbands, which came a long way down below his coat sleeves, almost as far down as Mr. Mabury's. Indeed Bessie thought that his general appearance was quite as imposing as the clergyman's, or that of any other gentleman she had ever seen. And then he had such a jaunty, free and easy air, and used such fine words, and swung his cane about with such grace, that poor Bessie, who had never associated on familiar terms with any but the ordinary village people, who had a dialect peculiar to themselves, felt herself lifted into an entirely new sphere of life. If she had been a judge of physiognomy, she might have found something unpleasantly suggestive in the bleared eyes and purple lips of her companion; but Miss Hepzibah's housemaid

was not a judge of physiognomy. She only knew that Peter Monk was the finest gentleman she had ever seen, and that Mr. Narrowby himself, or even the new steward, never wore a grander breast-pin than that which dazzled her eyes now.

And to be called "Miss Ashton" too. That was so nice. It made her feel so like a lady. No one had ever called her "Miss Ashton" before; it gave her quite a new feeling, almost as quick a thrill of pleasure as a young bride feels when first called by her husband's name. It was so very polite of Mr. Monk to call her "Miss Ashton."

"I—I did not know you were here," she stammered out at last, "I thought you was away somewhere at London."

"Yes," said Monk, twirling his cane, "I live at London now. Fine place London for a man of talent. I have a first-rate time of it now—good salary, plenty of liberty; and I thought I should just like to run down and see the old place again, and inquire after a few of my old friends, especially one that I feel a very tender regard for, a very tender regard, I assure you, Miss Ashton."

Bessie was conscious of those eyes fixed upon her again, and she turned very rosy, which made

her look prettier than ever. What a good thing it was she had not gone down the haling-bank road as she was intending to do.

"Dull little place this, dreadfully slow," continued Monk, looking round with a patronising air upon the field sports. "Nothing to compare with the parks in London. Splendid place, London. Suppose you don't know it, Miss Ashton?"

"No, sir, I don't," faltered Bessie, with another timid glance at the breast-pin. "But I've heard a very deal about it. It's a big place, isn't it? A very deal bigger than what Meadowthorpe is."

"Oh yes, my dear, much bigger than Meadowthorpe. In fact our establishment at the west-end is almost as large as the whole of this village."

"Law! Mr. Monk. You don't say it! Dear me!"

"Fact. We drive a terrific trade, quite terrific. The amount of goods we turn out in a season is something astounding. Wonderful place ours—wonderful. But I see," said Peter Monk, changing his tone, "you are looking as blooming as ever. That colour of yours is charming. I assure you it would make quite a sensation in the parks at London."

"Would it?" said Bessie, simply, not quite sure

what a sensation meant, but taking for granted it was something pleasant. London must be a fine place, she really would like to go to London and make a sensation.

“Yes, we don't often see such colour as that at London. It really is a pity you are not at London, you would make your fortune in no time in one of the west-end drapery establishments. I know several young ladies not half so good-looking as you are, who married gentlemen as soon as ever they got into the establishment. Excuse me, but it is really a shame you should stay here, where no one appreciates you. You would get on so much better at London.”

“Do they give very great wage there, Mr. Monk, in them there places?”

“Oh, dear, yes. A young lady of your prepossessing personal appearance——”

“What, please, sir?”

“Your pretty face and figure, my dear, would command a salary of fifty pounds at least. I know of an establishment now, contiguous to ours, where there's a place to spare, as the master would be only too proud to put a young lady like you into it. Now, if you would allow yourself to be persuaded.”

“But there'd be a great deal of work, wouldn't there, Mr. Monk, at that wage? I get nothing but only nine pound here, and I'm at it from morning to night, scarcely ever a bit o' time to myself except when it's a holiday like this here.”

“That's because you're throwing yourself away in a stupid place, where there's nobody to put a proper value upon you. The young ladies in the establishment I'm a-mentioning to you, hasn't nothing menial to do, only to walk up and down the millinery department in flounced black silk—the manager always expects his young ladies to wear black flounced silk—and show articles to the people who come. And they have all their Sundays loose, and of a night, too, while any time they choose. If you would only allow me now, Miss Ashton, to mention your name and get you the place.”

Fifty pounds a year and all her Sundays loose. And no scrubbing or scouring or cleaning of knives and forks, but only to wear black flounced silk like Mrs. Mabury, and chenille nets with gold spangles, if she liked, and to walk up and down a long room, turning over pretty things, and perhaps trying them on before the glass when there didn't

happen to be any customers waiting. Bessie began to feel as if she should very much like to go into an establishment and do like that. Certainly it was much better than a housemaid's place at nine pounds a year, with the ultimate prospect of a four-roomed cottage, where she should have to do all her own work just the same as now, for it was a chance if Roy ever earned more than a pound a week in the Duke's yard, and even a girl to scour floors could not be hired out of that. Bessie pictured herself down on her hands and knees with a bucket and floor-cloth beside her, and a dirty apron tied over her print gown, whilst she scrubbed the flags in the back yard of Roy's cottage. And then she pictured herself in black flounced silk, with a spangled net, or maybe her hair in ringlets all round—she thought she would wear it in ringlets all round—and perhaps a gold watch and chain, she could very soon buy a gold watch and chain out of fifty pounds a year, and a pocket-handkerchief with lace round it, held gracefully in her hand instead of the scouring-brush. Yes, it *was* a shame that she should stop in stupid little Meadowthorpe when such a future lay before her, dependent only on Mr. Monk mentioning her name

to the manager of the establishment. Then Mr. Monk asked if he might have the pleasure of conducting her round the field; and he offered her his arm so gracefully, just as Dr. Maguire used to do to his wife for the first two or three months after they were married. Bessie felt almost ashamed of taking it, Mr. Monk was so very much like a real gentleman. She was quite sure that no one in Meadowthorpe, not even the Rector himself, wore finer broadcloth or more soft than that upon which she was now invited to rest her hand. But when once she got over that little feeling of awkwardness, it was very pleasant to walk up and down the field with her London companion, and to feel that people were turning round and admiring them both, perhaps wondering at his beautiful shirt collar with its pattern of dogs' heads, and the breast-pin which flashed so in the sunshine. And he made himself so very agreeable, and always called her "Miss Ashton," instead of plain, vulgar "Bessie," and he said how very often he had thought of her, and he hoped she was not still intending to throw herself away upon that man in the Duke's timber-yard, that Roy, who would make her live in a four-roomed cottage all her days, and

wear cotton gowns, instead of flounced silks, as she might do if she allowed him to mention her name to the manager of the establishment contiguous to that in which he was employed.


Bessie decided that Peter Monk was right. Certainly it was a pity that a figure like hers should always be muffled up in sixpenny print, and that a face so fair should never have any other adornment than the half-crown Dunstable with two or three blue bows inside. She was still more decided when Peter began to tell her about his fine London acquaintances; the theatres and concerts and Sunday afternoons in the parks; the young gentlemen who would be so kind to her and take her about to see the sights. Bessie would be sure to be a favourite with the young gentlemen, for no one could look at her pretty face and not take a fancy to her, and most likely before she had been in the establishment a twelvemonth, she would marry somebody grand and keep her carriage. Many a girl not half so good-looking as herself had done the same, so Mr. Monk said.

So they walked up and down the field, the village lads and lasses turning round to look at them, Roy busy fixing up evergreen wreaths at

the Hall, thinking of the day not far off now when Bessie, too, should change homes, not with so much ringing of bells and scattering of flowers and prancing of rosetted horses, but still with love and hope enough to brighten all their lives and make that little four-roomed cottage a very paradise. But Bessie was not thinking anything of the sort. She was thinking what a pleasant place London would be to live in, and how she was throwing herself away by promising to marry that poor fellow Roy, even though he had been so kind to her and given her the lilac muslin dress which Peter Monk said suited her complexion so well. Not so well though as another muslin he had seen in London, and which he quite meant to bring down as a present for her, only he didn't happen to have change enough in his pocket ; a beautiful peach-blossom on a white ground, with a double skirt and a sash to match. And when Bessie once got the notion of a peach-blossom dress with a sash and double skirt, that poor little lilac muslin that had nothing but white spots on it did look so mean and insignificant.

Take care, Bessie.

CHAPTER II.

Y and by the rattling of crockery was heard, blending with the shouts of racers and wrestlers, and people began to draw towards the tent where tea was being prepared for all those who chose to take it. Dinner was only for the Duke's men, tea was for everybody.

Mr. Monk declined going into the tent. He was afraid the village set would crowd upon him so, being from London. It was such a nuisance having folks asking how you were and how you were getting on. He should much prefer remaining with his lovely companion, if Miss Ashton was not particularly wishful to go into the tent.

No, Miss Ashton was not particularly wishful to go into the tent. There was nobody she cared for in the tent. Besides, she had a dim sort of

notion that not to care about tea made her seem more like a lady. It was ungenteel to think so much of eating, to crush round the tables for plum cake and spice bread, like Abigail and the rest of them. She would stay there on the oak stump and hear a little more about this establishment in London. So Mr. Monk sent one of the children to fetch her a cup of tea; and whilst she drank it, he refreshed himself with something out of a flask in his coat pocket. Then they walked up and down again, arm in arm, he pressing her hand very often to his broad-cloth sleeve, Bessie stealing sly glances at the breast-pin and the shining gold chain and the wonderful collar with dogs' heads upon it, and thinking how nice it would be always to walk with people who wore such fine clothes and had such a polite way of speaking as Mr. Monk had. Oh! London must be a famous place for turning country people into ladies and gentlemen.

They were still walking up and down in that way, when Roy, who had hurried back from the Hall for a dance with Bessie, reached the field. On his way he heard that Peter Monk had come down from London to see the sport, and was

having a fine time with Bessie Ashton amongst the company. It was Mark Brayson, the constable's son, who told him. Mark was vexed with Bessie for being so cold to him an hour before, and so he was rather glad to have an opportunity of serving her out in this way.

Peter Monk at Meadowthorpe again, and Bessie walking with him? Bessie, who had promised never to speak to the man again. It could not be true. Roy would not believe it.

"I never axed you to believe it," said Mark, spitefully. "I nobbut telled you that there's what she's doin' of. You may go and look for yourself, and then maybe you'll be a bit civiller than to give folks the lie that way."

Roy went, but only to find Mark's story too true. There was Bessie's lilac muslin dress fluttering side by side with the London-cut coat of the dismissed engine-man, her hand resting on his arm, his crafty eyes gloating upon her fresh young face. Roy met them, looking pale and defiant.

"Monk, you scoundrel! how dare you?"

Then his voice choked with passion. He could say no more. But his clenched fist, the angry sparkle of his eyes, told the rest.

Peter was not ready for a quarrel just then. There were too many people about. Besides, he knew very well that in a struggle with that strong well-knit frame, he would have small chance of escape. He just whispered, "I shall see you again, Miss Ashton," and then, leaving poor Bessie to explain matters as well as she could, he slipped away, and was soon lost amongst the thickening crowds of people.

"Come with me, Bessie."

And Roy took her hand and led her away into a quiet part of the field.

"Oh, Bessie! Bessie darling, you shouldn't have done it. You shouldn't serve me so."

There was no anger in his voice when he spoke to her, only the sadness of deeply wounded love. She had grieved him very much. But Bessie was in no mood for tender reproach.

"I don't know, Roy," she said, "as I've been serving you any way improper. Mr. Monk's an old friend, and he's been making hisself very agreeable, a very deal more so than some folks takes the trouble to do."

Bessie's lower nature was in the ascendant now, her love of flattery and admiration. Monk's ca-

joling words had roused her vanity, and made her quite forget the old love that had once been so sweet. She went on in a pert, petulant tone.

"I don't see as I'm to sit moping on a stump all day because you choose to go away and leave me, instead of stopping to take me about and show me things. But I'm not going to be kept under your finger and thumb that way. It's just men's tricks, they won't let the women have a bit o' liberty so long as they can keep 'em from it, and I aren't going to put up with it any longer, I aren't. I reckon there's plenty more would be as good to me and better than what you are."

"Bessie," said Roy, still keeping hold of her hand, though she tried to get it from him, "Bessie, I telled you a long time ago, before I loved you so much as I do now, that if Peter Monk had been the man to make you a good husband, I'd have given you up to him, ay and that I would, even if it had cost me all the peace I'm ever to know i' this world; for I'd rather see you happy, if I had to go lonely for it myself. But, Bessie, he'll never do you no good, won't Peter Monk, and it 'll be a bad day for you if you ever engage yourself to have ought to do with him."

"You needn't go on at me that way, Roy. Mr. Monk hasn't been saying nothing to me as isn't proper."

"Then what has he been saying to you?" asked Roy, the angry sparkle coming back to those honest eyes. "Mark Brayson telled me you'd been having a fine time with him."

Bessie felt rather pleased to think that her doings were of sufficient importance for the constable's son to go and chronicle them to Roy, and also that Roy should be so much impressed by them. She might as well make the impression deeper. What would he say when he found she was going to London?

"Mr. Monk's been telling me as how I could make a woman of myself in yon place where he's gone to live, and I could get a vast o' wage wi' engaging myself into a establishment, and I needn't have to work neither, nor do nothing as would tew my things. And he knows of a place where they'd be glad enough to get me, and he telled me he'd speak to the gentleman as kept it."

"Oh Bessie!" and all the anger died out of Roy's face again, leaving only that sad earnest look, "you wouldn't do that. Say you wouldn't

do that. And I've got things made so comfortable for you, and there's the room ready papered, and a nice bit o' carpet for the front kitchen as I bought at St. Olaves' only a week back, and such a bonnie set o' picters for to hang up, but I thought I wouldn't say nothing about 'em yet a bit, to make it more of a surprise for you. And the time's getting so near now, Bessie, you wouldn't think of going away, would you, and leaving the cottage and everything?"

The cottage, with four rooms, bits of rooms that you couldn't swing a cat in. And to spend her life there, scouring and baking and washing, getting a new bonnet may be once a year, and a frock not so often, when she might be a fine lady in a London establishment, and wear black flounced silk every day, with a gold chain, and her hair in ringlets. To say nothing of marrying a fine gentleman some day, and being taken about to see sights, and walking in the parks on a Sunday afternoon. Was it likely that Bessie would reply very humbly to Roy's appeal? Was it any great destiny to be his wife, to have her hand always held in that which clasped it now so tenderly? No, Bessie pulled her hand away. She did not

care for it to be there any more, she thought.

"You've a great notion of your pretty cottage, Mr. Roy. Folks might think there wasn't another in Meadowthorpe to be set again it. And if you're so very keen o' getting somebody into it, you'd better ask them as isn't fit for nothing better. I don't see as I need look to live in a cottage always."

"Do you mean that, Bessie?"

No, Bessie did not mean it. It was just a taunt, thrown out to provoke submission. She was angry, excited, passionate. Peter Monk had put a new life before her eyes, compared with which the old one appeared mean and poor. But instead of taking back her cruel words, she heaped more and crueller upon them.

"I always mean what I say, Roy, and I've put up with your stinginess long enough, wanting to keep me like a mouse in a trap and never letting me speak to nobody without you've a mind to. And you'd better tie my tongue up right away if I'm never to use it only at your beck and bidding. I'll give you back your promise, and you may do as you like, and you may get some one to marry you as will let you tread her down as much as you please, without ever giving back word, you may."

Again Roy said, very quietly,

“Do you mean that, Bessie?”

Bessie was angrier than ever because he said it so quietly.

“Yes, I do mean it, and I’ll die before I say anything different. You may offer your cottage as you think so much about to some one that can’t do no better for herself than marry a man to be trodden under and kept down, while you go about enjoying yourself among the Hall people, and seeing fine company, and creeping up great folk’s sleeves with fixing ’em garlands and such like.”

Roy got up and walked away, slowly, very slowly, his head held proudly back, his face calm with the calmness of intense emotion. Bessie watched him out of the field, feeling rather frightened at what she had done, but quite too proud to go after him and put her hand into his and say, “Roy, I’m very sorry,” which would have been the real truth, after all. For who was there like Roy, so brave and patient and good?

She let him get quite out of sight, and then very likely she would have begun to cry, but before she could make up her mind about it, Peter Monk

joined her again. He had been having a little turn round the village, to see how the old places looked. Would Miss Ashton oblige him with her hand now for a dance?

Bessie was just in that desperate mood which rushes to tears or merriment, no matter which, for its safety-valve. Yes, she would be very happy, indeed it wasn't often she got a chance to stand up with any one, and she was fine and proud of a country dance, that she was. So the next minute they were standing together amongst the rest of the company; his hand holding hers, his arm round her waist, the gay breast-pin sparkling close to her face. On they went, gliding in and out, smiling and bowing, hands across, down the middle and up again, he whispering pretty compliments to her all the time. And not without reason, for Bessie's eyes were flashing with excitement, and her cheeks were flushed, and her parted lips red as rosebuds. So pretty she looked that all the other young women in the dance—Polly Rush particularly, who had got Mark Brayson for a partner—cast envious glances at her, and then said what an ill-behaved, giddy hussy she was, to go on that way with Peter Monk, and she the promised wife

of another man, as all the village knew. And yet if Peter Monk had asked any of them, they would have been so proud.

But Peter Monk did not ask them. He danced with no one but Bessie, and Bessie danced with no one but him, until seven o'clock, when she said she reckoned she couldn't do anything more, and it was about time she was back home again. Then he set her as far as the little gate in the wall, saying he would manage to see her again in the morning before he went away to London. When he was gone, Bessie ran up-stairs into her bedroom, and, throwing herself on the bed, cried, oh! so bitterly! So bitterly that poor Janita Raeburn, who was doing something for Aunt Hepzibah in the great attic, heard her sobs, and came to see what was the matter. And Bessie said she was distracted with face-ache, that was all.

After he had left her, Roy went down the haling-bank road to his father's garden. But he could not rest there. He came back again to the field, and there, standing behind one of the great elm trees, watched Bessie dancing for a whole hour with Peter Monk. So near to them he was, that, as she glided past him in her partner's arms,

her lilac muslin dress, the dress he had given her, almost touched his arm; he could hear her gay laugh, too, and see the colour in her cheeks, and the flash of excitement in the grey eyes which were so often lifted to Monk's face. He had never seen her look so beautiful. Roy set his teeth together, and pressed his face against the old elm tree, until its knotted bark made deep furrows on his forehead; but he felt as if he could not move from the spot, he must stay to the end. Oh! what an evening that was for Roy!

Peter Monk set Bessie home, and as he came back to the field he took a second deep draught from the flask which he carried in his pocket, so that he was quite in the humour for being free and easy with a group of his old companions, who were standing at the gate. He had taken sufficient to make him merry, no more. Mark Brayson, the constable's son, was there, and young Alick, and Jem Wilson, the Duke's blacksmith's lad, besides several other men who usually went to the bridge foot on a Sunday afternoon. Peter began to talk to them in fine style about his London life; what good wages he got, what a jolly time he had of it in the parks and casinos, what a woman he would

make of Bessie when he got her persuaded to leave Meadowthorpe and engage herself into a drapery establishment at fifty pounds a year. Roy came up to the gate as Bessie's prospects were being talked over by the young men. He seized Monk by the arm so tightly as to make the little fellow wince for pain.

"What have you been saying to Bessie Ashton? What have you been getting her to promise?"

Monk looked round. There were men enough to take care of him. Young Brayson was on his side he knew, and Alick was not an enemy. He could afford to take it easily.

"Oh! ho!" he said with a twinkle of his small black eyes, "you're going to talk Dutch to me, are you? Well, then, you needn't trouble yourself. I know what I'm about, and there was never a man yet that put me off anything I'd a mind to do. You'd best let Dutch alone. I suppose one may say a civil word to the girl if she is pretty. There's many'll say better when she's up at London, the bonnie little wench."

"Peter Monk, you shall pay for this. I will make you repent it before long."

Roy's strong arm was uplifted. Monk saw the

blow coming, and cowered behind the tall stalwart figure of Larry Stead. Larry took hold of Roy's arm.

"Nay, Roy, lad, blows never did no good. I'll see as he keeps still and doesn't say no more again her. Go home, lad ; thee'll think better on it i' the morning."

Brayson, the constable's son, saw that uplifted arm, and the white passion of Roy's face. So did Alick and Jem Wilson, and those two men who had come, half drunk, out of the Checkers that afternoon six months ago, when the foreman of the Duke's timber-yard had quarrelled with Peter Monk at the bridge foot.

Roy went away. Not home though, as the men noticed, but towards his father's garden, where he was seen shortly afterwards by a young lad going home from the merrymaking.

Peter Monk set off to his lodging in St. Olave's about eight o'clock in the evening, going by the haling-bank road. Mark Brayson and Jem the blacksmith's lad went a little way with him. Not far, because Mark had to be up very early next morning to go some miles to work, and Jem had promised to dance another figure with Abigail,

to whom he had that evening made proposals, which it is needless to say were accepted.

Abigail went back to the Aspens in high spirits. Her stubby curls and new ribbons had done her good service. She should get wed as well as the rest of them, she said. And when she went upstairs into the whitewashed attic, and saw poor Bessie lying on the bed with parched lips and tear-swollen eyes, the plain cook thought within her own mind that good looks were not the only good things in the world.

By and by the last dance was over. The tents were cleared. Only a few scattered flowers and the down-trodden spoiled grass, told of the merry-making in the Hall field. Then lights began to flicker in the upper windows of the cottages. The harvest moon rose, silvering the red gables of Meadowthorpe Hall, casting long shadows across the quiet street, and over the level fields where the pollard willows shook their grey leaves, and the tall flags shivered as though some guilty thing had been whispered to them.

Next morning the body of Peter Monk was found in the dyke, down by the haling-bank road, just below old Ben Royland's garden.

CHAPTER III.



It was Mark Brayson, the constable's son, who found the body, as he was going to his work early next morning. He went home directly to tell his father, and finished his story by saying that Roy and Peter Monk had been having a desperate quarrel the night before; that Roy had vowed vengeance on the engine-man for looking so sweet upon Bessie at the dance, and that, most likely, he had pushed him into the dyke, in a fit of passionate jealousy. That was what Mark said. But Brayson was a wise man, and held his peace until he saw how things were likely to turn.

The body was brought to the Checkers, and a jury summoned to hold an inquest upon it. Bessie was sent for, to give her evidence before any one else was examined. Mr. Brayson came to fetch

her. He simply told her the facts of the case, refraining from implicating Roy in any way, as that might affect the truth of her evidence.

Bessie was going about her morning work, with a countenance paler and sadder than usual, when Miss Hepzibah went into the kitchen to tell her that Peter Monk had been found drowned; and that she was wanted to answer some questions before the coroner, who was holding an inquest over the body.

Bessie neither screamed nor fainted. She only turned very pale, as anyone might, on hearing of the sudden death of a well-known person. The first thought that flashed across her mind was this: that now nothing would stand between her and Roy, that Monk would not part them any more. And that going to London, ah! that going to London seemed such a different thing now, when the glamour of excitement had passed away, and the love which lay deep down in her heart had found room to stir again. She went with Mr. Brayson to the Checkers. The coroner and jury were sitting in one of the private rooms. Bessie curtsied very low.

“Your name is Bessie Ashton?” said the coroner.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are engaged to a young man named Royland, Benjamin Royland?"

"I was a bit since, sir, but I don't know as I is at the present. We had something of a falling out."

"And was this falling out in any way connected with Peter Monk?"

"Yes, sir, Roy objected to my keeping company with him."

"Did you know Peter Monk before he came to Meadowthorpe this time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you kept company with him before?"

"Yes, sir. A little bit now and then."

"How long is that since?"

"Maybe four months, sir. Mr. Monk went away from the Duke's yard last May."

"And did you ever see him any more until yesterday?"

"No, sir."

"You were dancing with him in the evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do you know if this young man that you call Roy had any words with him after that?"

"I don't know, sir. I never seed Roy after that."

"Did Monk go home with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was there anything particular in his manner then?"

"No, sir, not as I recollect of."

"You do not think he was in liquor?"

"Oh, dear no, sir! I'm sure he wasn't."

"Did you ever see him in liquor?"

"No, sir, I never heard tell as he was given to that sort o' thing."

"Did he go back again to the field, after he left you?"

"I don't know, sir. He didn't tell me what he was going to do."

"And was that the last time you saw him?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is sufficient, you can go now. You have given your evidence very sensibly, better than many young women would have done."

Bessie went back again to the Aspens, and did her work as usual, feeling perhaps for an hour or two slightly important at having been sent for by the constable, to give her evidence before a real

gentleman from St. Olave's; and then being complimented by him on giving it so well. But that passed away, and the sadness came back again; the weary weight of unforgiven wrong, beneath which no true heart can rest. Janita soon perceived that something was amiss between the pretty housemaid and Roy. She determined therefore, that as soon as the work was done, she would contrive to get Bessie sent out into the village, that they might set matters straight again. Her own sorrow did not make her less willing to lighten that of others.

After Bessie left the Checkers, many other Meadowthorpe people were examined. Abel Johnson and Seth Brown, the two men who had been coming out of the public-house that afternoon when Roy made his hasty speech at the bridge-foot, Barnie Wilson, Alick the smith, the constable's son, and the man who had seen Roy walking up and down his father's garden late on the previous evening.

It was thought at first that a verdict of "Accidentally drowned" would be returned, but as one man after another gave his evidence, the case assumed a more serious aspect. Everyone in the

village knew that there was a deep-lying grudge between Roy and Peter Monk. The foreman of the Duke's timber-yard had been heard to say that if Peter Monk did not mind, he would come to his death some day in the dyke; and only the night before, he had threatened to be revenged upon Monk, a threat which, coupled with Roy's passionate face and uplifted arm, meant mischief. There was no telling how things might end.

The jury went to view the place where the body had been found. It was rather a dangerous part of the haling-bank road, that little piece below old Ben Royland's garden, slippery very, and shelving down to the water. A man in liquor might easily stumble on the sloping ground, and so fall into the dyke, which was rather deep just there. Or a stranger in the place, if perfectly sober, might perhaps lose his footing, especially at night, for there was nothing, not even a post and rails, to guard the shelving part. But Peter Monk was not a man given to drink, at least no one could say it of him whilst he lived at Meadowthorpe. He had not been into the Checkers that day, so the landlord said. He had not joined the Duke's men at the dinner and made too free with himself there. He

was perfectly sober, Jem Wilson and the constable's son said, when he set off home with them. Then he was not a stranger in the place. He knew the haling-bank road well, for he always went to St. Olave's that way when he lived at Meadowthorpe. It was a clear moonlight night too, and that was an open part of the road, where there would be no shadows to mislead him. It was scarcely likely he should slip in accidentally. So the jury said.

Besides all this, which came out on the evidence, Barnie Wilson and Jem and Mark Brayson and many other men who had been in the field during the sports, had seen how Peter Monk behaved to Bessie. And they knew that he and Roy had had some words after the dance, when Roy had said he should pay for it, and had almost felled him there and then. They knew, too, how he had set off down the haling-bank road, muttering as he went; how he had been seen, late at night, walking in his father's garden, just about the time that Monk would be passing that part of the road. Knowing which, the jury looked at each other, and shook their heads.

Then old Mrs. Royland was examined.

“What time did your son come home last night?”

"It were very late, sir, past twelve by the clock; me and my husband had been waiting of him while we didn't know what was matter."

"Is the young man in the habit of staying out late?"

"Oh no, sir, he's a good lad is Roy, as reg'lar as the church bell, and never misses bein' in at half-past nine this time o' year."

"And did you ask him what made him so late?"

"No, sir, he never gave us a chance, for he went straight upstairs without ever saying a word."

"Did he look much as usual?"

"No, sir, my husband and me never seed him wi' such a look afore. He was sort o' pale and frightened like, and we both on us said as summut must be up."

And then poor old Mrs. Royland was told she might go home again.

All things looked very dark against Roy. Had Monk been a man given to liquor, they would have returned a verdict of "accidental death." They would have done the same had he been a stranger in the place, or had the night been dark and he unaccustomed to the road. But he had known the haling-bank road for years, and they

could not find that he had bought any liquor, either in St. Olave's or Meadowthorpe ; neither was any flask found upon his person or amongst his things in the lodging at St. Olave's.

However, the result of it all was, that the day after the great wedding, Mr. Brayson, the constable, went to the cottage in Meadowthorpe lane with a warrant for the apprehension of Benjamin Royland, junior, on a charge of wilful murder. And before nightfall, poor Roy was led away, under the very garlands and festoons which he had helped to put up, to St. Olave's gaol, there to await his trial at the next assizes, which would take place in a month or six weeks.

And that was the end of the holiday which had been looked forward to so eagerly by the village people.

The news of Roy's arrest was brought to Professor Ruthven's house by the milkman, who had met the young man on his way to the gaol, between the constable and a policeman.

Abigail received it with open-mouthed eagerness. She had a little internal grudge against her rosy-cheeked fellow-servant, not only on account of her popularity with the Meadowthorpe young men, but

also because Bessie, with the usual perversity of pretty girls, had often amused herself at the expense of Abigail's tow-like wisps of curls and freckled forehead and flat nose. It was the plain cook's turn now, though.

"Pretty doings there's been in the village, indeed, and all along of your imperence and bold-facedness," she said, stroking down her check apron as she came into the kitchen, brimful of importance, and set her basin of milk on the dresser. "You'll get yourself talked about fine and nicely now, if you never was in your life before; ay, and stared at, too, if you've cheek enough to put your head out into the street any more in daylight; which you wouldn't do if you'd the proper feelin's of a young female. The folks'll all be pointing at you now, and serve you right too; such boldness and impudence, keeping company with men that way afore all the village, as it 'ud do you good to have Miss Hepzibah told, and she'd soon bundle you off, without a character to your back, or anything to serve yourself with. I'm thankful I never disgraced myself that way."

Bessie, who stood by the table rubbing her silver spoons, did not fire up at this outburst of feminine

eloquence as she might have done a week ago. There was a very bitter, chilling thought slowly growing up in her heart. What if she should have vexed Roy too much? What if, when she got the chance to speak to him and ask him to forgive her, he should be stern and relentless? Her conscience told her he had only too much cause to feel so. And there were plenty of girls in the village who would be proud enough to win and wear the love which she had flung so scornfully away; or to make their life-long home in the little four-roomed cottage where she and Roy might have been so happy.

Might have been. Oh dear! it was perhaps all over now. Sadly enough that day had she remembered Roy's patience, his forbearance, his kind, tender way with her when she had vexed him so with her vanity and foolishness. She had gone too far at last, and her heart grew chill within her as she recalled that cold "Do you mean it, Bessie?" just before he got up and left her. Oh! if she could only see him again for just one moment, to say "Forgive me, Roy."

But she was working on very fast, for Miss Jane had told her she might go for the bread after tea,

and then she should just have time to run down to the cottage and get speech of Roy. Maybe he might be in, and she could tell him how sorry she was, and how she would try not to vex him again, but be always loving and true. So she polished away at her silver spoons, giving little or no heed to Abigail's exhortations.

This silent reception of her eloquence vexed the plain cook very much, and moved her to a still more vehement outburst.

"Yes, I say it 'ud serve you right to have Miss Hepzibah let to know about it, and see you turned out at a day's notice without a bit of wage to bless yourself with. And it's only proper as it should be done, for you aren't fit company for a decent, respectable cook like me, as came to my sitivation with the best of caracters, and everything that's proper, and always did my endeavours to keep myself out of the way of the men, as it's the duty of a proper female to do, and never set myself out with anything as wasn't agreeable to the catechism as the clergyman taught me it afore I was confirmed."

Abigail stopped, and took a drink of milk out of the basin. She wasn't accustomed to so much talking in a general way. Then she continued.

"I say always conducting myself agreeable to the catechism, and here you're gallivanting round the Hall field with a man as you've no call to so much as speak to even, and you as good as asked in church to some one else as was willing to marry you, and it's thankful you ought to be to get married at all, for there isn't many as 'ud cumber themselves with such a piece o' useless rubbish, for it ain't rosy cheeks makes good wives, and I never heard tell yet as eyes wi' black lashes to 'em could see to mix a better pudding nor them as had none at all. But good looks isn't everything, and you may put your towels and sheets by, and bits o' things as you've been stitching again' you get married; for when one o' your lovers is drowned and t' other's goin' to be hanged, there isn't much look out for a wedding as I sees."

"I don't know what you mean," said Bessie, sighing wearily. "There was never nobody belonged to me as was drowned or got hisself hanged. What is it you mean?"

"I think I've made it plain enough for them as has wits to see it. If some folks has got pretty faces, their heads is as thick as millstones. That young man o' yours has been and gone and pushed

poor Mr. Monk into Meadowthorpe dyke, and murdered him, and the inquest's proved it agen him, the milkman says it has. And they've took him to St. Olave's gaol, where he'll be hanged as sure as sure, and serve him right too; for when a man can't keep his temper he ought to swing for it. And that's what I've got to say."

"Roy going to be hung? Oh, Roy! Roy!"

And with a piercing shriek, which rang through every corner of that old house, Bessie Ashton fell senseless on the kitchen floor.

CHAPTER IV.



BLESSINGS on us! what *is* the matter?" exclaimed the female head of the household, as, with half a dozen yards of unbleached calico dragging after her, she bustled into the kitchen, and saw Bessie lying on the floor surrounded by silver spoons and forks. "What is the matter? Has the girl had a fit, or what is it? Do be quick and throw some water in her face. Dear me! dear me! a pretty kettle of fish indeed!" And Miss Hepzibah whisked about like an India-rubber ball.

"You needn't go to put yourself out o' t' way, ma'am," said Abigail. "It's nought but contrarieness, it isn't. As sure as I'm a living woman I nobbut telled her as her young man, him that she keeps company with, had been took to gaol for

murdering Mr. Monk, and she set up that skree as you heard, ma'am, fit to rouse the churchyard. I'd let half the parish be took to gaol, I would, afore I'd make such a simpleton of myself. But you see, ma'am, she's coming round again, it's all nothing but temper," continued the plain cook of steady principles, as poor Bessie opened her eyes with a dreary, vacant expression. "Perhaps you haven't heard about it, ma'am. It was the milkman as telled me this afternoon, and the village is all of a uproar. There's been a quarrel betwixt Bessie's young man and Mr. Monk, ever since she began to keep company with him, but I shouldn't ha' thought he'd ha' done such a wicked thing as that there, and him going to church reg'lar and singing i' the parish choir, let alone being teacht his catechism before he were put apprentice. Some folks is bad though, and other folks isn't."

Abigail flung this concluding sentence across the kitchen to Bessie, who had got up now and was supporting herself against the clock. The first clause was for her unfortunate fellow-servant, the second she appropriated to her worthy self.

Miss Hepzibah, standing there in the middle of

the kitchen, the unbleached calico draperies gathered round her lank form after the manner of antique sculpture, looked rigidly severe. She discerned in this catastrophe the fruit of Janita's foolish indulgence to the flirtish, frivolous little housemaid. When did anything but unpleasantness ever result from girls in service being allowed facilities for intercourse with members of the opposite sex? Such facilities should not be allowed in her establishment for the future.

"Bessie, your conduct is very improper," the discreet virgin said at last, after transfixing the poor girl with a glance from behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. "I do not approve of anything of this sort, it is contrary to my principles. I always had my doubts about allowing the young man to come to the house, and it's very thoughtless of you, Bessie, to give way in that manner, with the silver spoons in your hand, and the afternoon work not done. Why didn't you lay the spoons down when you knew you were going to faint?"

"Please, ma'am, I couldn't help it," sobbed Bessie. "It did give me such a turn, I'm sure it did."

"Then you shouldn't have allowed it to give

you a turn," answered Miss Hepzibah, who had no sympathy for any misfortune of which love or good looks had been the cause. "You ought to have exercised more control over yourself. I never fainted in my life, and I've had a great many surprises to go through, and sudden deaths, and apoplexies, and that sort of thing. But it's no use standing there, reared up against the clock, and shaking like a mould of jelly that hasn't been enough boiled. Go to your own room, and sit down there until you come round again, and I daresay Abigail will be kind enough to make you a cup of tea."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bessie, submissively.

Abigail eyed her with contemptuous triumph as she tottered slowly out of the room.

"It's precious little need she has of a cup o' tea, the good for nothing baggage, and to think of her taking a sitiuation along with a respectable female like me, as always does the best that lies in my possibles to keep myself decent and out of the way of the men, and never set myself forward to be looked at, nor nothing of that sort. But it's all her own doings, ma'am, and she may be thankful it isn't herself as is going to hang by the neck for

it. But I'll make her a cup o' tea, ma'am, as you say she's to have it, and I was always brought up to obey them what has the rule over me, and I've said ever since I was sitiwated here, as there wasn't a missis in Meadowthorpe more proper to be respected than yourself. And I'm sure, ma'am, you'll bear me out as I say what's true."

"Yes, Abigail. I have no fault whatever to find with the manner in which you have discharged your duties as plain cook since you came into my establishment."

Abigail dropped a curtsey and set the kettle on.

"To be sure, ma'am, not to mention things as I've done out o' free will and love that wasn't agreed upon for the wage, but I always said to myself you'd make it up to me some way or other, for there isn't a lady knows better than yourself what's proper to do for them as has money to do it. And if anything should happen as I should get wed, or ought o' that sort, I don't misdoubt but what you'd remember me with something handsome, suitable for a lady like yourself, as there isn't a better or one that's more respected in Meadowthorpe village. And it isn't everyone that gets a good servant, one that's willing to do her duty and keep herself clear of

the men, as I've used my best endeavours to do ever since I was sitiwated cook here, and set a example to Bessie what a servant ought to be."

"Yes, Abigail," and Miss Hepzibah began to wrap up her calico in readiness to depart, "you may rely upon it that I shall remember you with what is suitable when the time comes."

"Thank you, ma'am. And I said it was nought but right you should be let know how yon girl's been a conducting of herself, disgracing a decent respectable place like your own as ought to have the pick of servants in it, and I've got a sister wants a situation, that has the best of caracters, and would serve you a vast better nor Bessie as keeps company with anybody that says a pretty word to her. And they say, ma'am, the young man's dreadful hard and won't submit hisself nor nothing of the sort. The milkman seed them take him to gaol and he walked as stiff upright and held his head like a born king, and he wouldn't put on the handcuffs as the constable brought, cause he said they wasn't fit things for a honest man to wear. It's shocking is the hardness of some folks, and he brought up so careful. But it's a good thing people isn't all alike."

And Abigail stroked her apron again complacently and dropped another curtsey, as Miss Hepzibah returned to the dining-room.

Poor Bessie tried to drag herself upstairs, but she got no farther than the first landing. There she crouched down on the mat by the best lodging-room door, rocking to and fro, moaning wearily. She was still moaning there when Janita came out from her own little room ; Janita, whose sorrow could not be wept over, nor fainted over, nor bemoaned in any public way, only hidden under the garb of daily cheerfulness, and kept quietly out of sight.

“What is the matter, Bessie ?” said she, laying her hand on the girl’s shoulder.

“Oh! Miss Jane ! it’s Roy, poor Roy ! They’ve been and gone and took him to gaol ’cause he’s pushed Mr. Monk into the dyke and drowned him. And he wouldn’t do such a wicked thing, I’m sure he wouldn’t ; but it must be true, for the milkman says so, and he seed the policeman a-taking of him, and he says they’ll hang him as sure as sure. Oh! dear! *What* shall I do? *What shall* I do ?” And Bessie wrung her hands again in helpless misery.

Roy taken to prison to be tried and sentenced

and hanged? Roy, the brave, handsome Roy, who had been so kind to Janita when she was ill, and brought her flowers from his father's garden! Roy, the pride of the village, the darling of his poor old mother! All this going to happen to Roy?

Janita was practical and clear-sighted. She perceived at once how it was. She remembered Roy's daring, somewhat passionate spirit, his jealousy of Peter Monk's intimacy with Bessie, the questions which the girl had been asked at the inquest that morning. There was cause enough for fear. Well might Bessie sit there, wringing her hands and crying helplessly, "*What shall I do? What shall I do?*"

"I am afraid you can do nothing just now, Bessie, but bear it patiently. Go into my room and sit down in the easy-chair, and I will come to you by and by."

Janita brought her a glass of wine. Then she tied on her hat and went at once across the Square to Mr. Narrowby, the magistrate who had granted the warrant. Gavin Rivers might have given her more information, but to him she could not go.

Mr. Narrowby was very courteous. Yes, it was

all quite true. Young Roy had been apprehended on suspicion of having murdered Peter Monk by pushing him into the dyke. They were known to have had a quarrel that night, in which Roy had threatened Monk's life. They had both taken the same road to St. Olave's, and Roy had returned home late, unusually depressed and melancholy. Mr. Narrowby was afraid the case would go hardly against him from the evidence that had been produced at the inquest. Still, Roy had always been a young man of good character. That was in his favour. The new steward, too, was disposed to think favourably of him, and had promised to engage counsel from London in his behalf. They must wait and see how things turned out.

So Janita came back. Bessie was sitting in the west room, crying and sobbing as if her heart would break. This, all the burden of her cry,

“What shall I do? What shall I do?”

“Now, Bessie, tell me all about it,” said Janita, as she sat down beside the poor girl.

Ah! that was just what Bessie needed—to tell some one “all about it,” to unburden her weak, foolish little heart of all its anxious load. If only

Janita could have done the same, but that was not to be. And the very thought that some one cared about her sorrows, seemed to lighten them, for Bessie dried her tears, and brightened up in a feeble sort of way.

"It's very kind of you, Miss Jane," she began ; "and I shouldn't ha' been so bad if I could ha' telled somebody about it afore. But Abigail's always calling of me, and Miss Hepzibah's kind o' strong and hard while I don't like to say nought to her. But it's different with you, Miss Jane, you've always been kind to me ever since you came. I'm sure it's no wonder Mr. Rivers used to say——"

"Never mind what Mr. Rivers said," Janita replied, quietly, "only tell me about yourself and Roy. You have quarrelled, have you not?"

"Yes, Miss Jane; but it was all my fault, every bit. I angered him so while he couldn't bear it no longer, and he always used to be so good to me and patient, and now if anything happens him, it's me that's murdered him, it is."

And then Bessie broke out into fresh grief. When her tears had spent themselves she began again—

“It was all as nice as could be when I got me dressed yesterday afternoon and went into the Hall field, and we was walking about together, and I sure I’d never felt so happy afore. And then he was obliged to go away up to the Hall to help ’em to fix some garlands for the ball at night, and while he was off, Mr. Monk comed to me and started talking to me about London, and how I might get a great wage with hiring myself into one of them there establishments to walk about and show things. He telled me I could get more wage because I was better-looking than a good many, though I never knew afore that folks got paid for their looks. And then Roy came back, and he was angered about it, and I didn’t want to give in, and I said I wouldn’t have him, and he went away looking so still and queer-like. Summut told me as I ought to go after him and take back my ill words, but I couldn’t for shame to do it, because I’d never humbled myself to no one afore, and never meant to.”

Ah! Bessie, that humbling of oneself is a lesson hard to be learned.

“And did you not see him again, and tell him so?” asked Janita.

"No, Miss Jane. I never saw him after that. When he'd left me, Peter Monk come up and axed me to dance with him. And I felt that way as if I didn't care what I did, only I could let Roy see as I wasn't afraid on him. And I danced with Mr. Monk while it was time to come home, and after that I believe they had a quarrel, but I never heard about it exact how it was. Oh! Miss Jane, it was very wrong of me, and I'm real sorry; but it's no use now, for I can't get speech of him to tell him. And he thinks I don't care for him, because that was the last word I ever telled him afore he went away, and I telled him too as I'd die afore I said ought else different."

"Do you think, Bessie, that Roy loved you truly?"

"Oh! yes, Miss Jane. I'm sure he did. I'd believe Roy again all the world, over and over, for he never told me a word yet that wasn't true as true."

"And do you love him, Bessie, now?"

"Yes, Miss Jane, I *do* love Roy."

Bessie's whole soul spoke out in that one little sentence, all the love that lay far away down beneath her vain, foolish ways. And there was

neither blush nor tear as she said it, that was no time for them.

"Then," said Janita, after she had thought for some time, "you shall tell him so. You ought to tell him so. If anything happens, it will be a great consolation to know that nothing was left unsaid between you. And if he should be set free again——"

"Oh! Miss Jane, do you think they will let him out? The milkman told Abigail he'd be hanged as sure as could be. But do you think they *will* let him out?"

"We cannot tell that yet, Bessie. Mr. Narrowby said that things looked very dark against him, but the other magistrate has promised to do what he can."

"Is that Mr. Rivers, Miss Jane?"

"Yes, Mr. Rivers."

"Ay, then, I mind Roy saying there wasn't a man alive as could go again Mr. Rivers, when he'd set hisself to do ought."


"And if Roy should be set free, he will believe in your love when he knows that chains and disgrace did not keep you from him. Will you go, Bessie, and tell him all that you have told me?"

Bessie go to the St. Olave's gaol and ask Roy's forgiveness? Bessie, who had never humbled herself to anyone, never owned one fault or taken back one angry word, or mourned, except in thought, for all her wilfulness and impatience? Bessie go and ask back again the love she had flung away so scornfully, crave as a boon what she had denied as a gift? Could she do it?

There was a glitter, not all of tears, in Bessie's eyes as she lifted them, after a long pause, to Janita's face. And then with a passionate gesture, in which she seemed to fling away from her the old nature with all its folly and weakness, she said—

“Miss Jane, I'll go.”

CHAPTER V.

T was not according to rule for the friends of a prisoner to be admitted to a private interview with him before the trial, except in special cases, when a note was granted by the magistrate of the place in which the parties resided. Janita knew this, and she went again to Mr. Narrowby, requesting a note of admission for Bessie.

But Ralph Narrowby, Esquire, though on the whole a worthy little man, was somewhat pompous, and, like his wife, disposed to magnify the authority of his position. He was exceedingly sorry, it gave him great pain to refuse any request from a lady whom he esteemed so highly as Miss Raeburn; he really should have been most happy to use his influence on her behalf. But the rules were stringent. He did not feel himself justified in overstepping

those rules. The young people had been foolish, very foolish. He had gone through the merits of the case carefully, and he thought that the painful suspense in which Bessie Ashton found herself at present would prove a wholesome lesson. He—Miss Raeburn must excuse him—but he could not interfere in the matter, or give his sanction to the breaking of the regulations which were enforced in such cases. If sentence was given against young Royland, as really seemed most likely at present, his friends would have opportunities of seeing him in the condemned cell. Great indulgencies were allowed to parties in the condemned cell. They were treated with every consideration, had superior diet, the attendance of a chaplain whenever required, were allowed to see their relatives almost daily. In fact, nothing could exceed the kindness shown by the prison authorities to criminals in the condemned cell.

And with this very cheering information, and with many kind messages to the Professor and Miss Ruthven, Mr. Narrowby bowed Janita out of his private room.

Only Mr. Rivers could help her now, but she dare not go to him. She had scarcely seen him,

never spoken to him since that afternoon, nearly a month ago, when he had called at the Aspens, and helped her to arrange her ferns. Then he had said he should come again very soon. But that was all over. Of course he would not come now, neither could she go to him. Then she thought of Miss Alwyne, good, quiet Miss Alwyne, who was always ready to do anyone a kind action. And she went to the cottage.

She found her friend at home, just returned from a visit to poor old Mrs. Royland, who had been in a dull, half-unconscious stupor ever since Roy's committal. Miss Alwyne promised to see Mr. Rivers that day, and if possible get a note of admission for Bessie.

"But why not ask the steward yourself, my dear? I am sure there is no one to whom Mr. Rivers would more willingly do a favour."

"Oh no! I cannot, indeed I cannot," Janita said, hurriedly, and then added in a quieter tone, "It would be better for you, being an older person, to see him about it. I know it is a great favour to ask, but Roy and Bessie have quarrelled in some way, and broken with each other, and she wishes now to be reconciled to him. It is so sad, you

know, when misunderstandings like these cannot be explained."

"It is," said Miss Alwyne, emphatically. "The note must be got."

"And you will not tell Mr. Rivers that I asked you to get it?"

"I will not," said Miss Alwyne, "since you do not wish it."

And she could not but notice the eager, anxious manner in which Janita made this request. Perhaps a suspicion of the truth crossed her mind, but it was not Miss Alwyne's way to ask questions, or seek to know anything concerning her nearest and dearest friends which they did not voluntarily reveal. Besides, the news of the new steward's engagement to Elene Somers had not yet transpired, even in gossiping little Meadowthorpe.

Miss Alwyne went to the Hall next morning. Mr. Rivers had gone to London an hour before, on business connected with the estate. He would not be from home long, so the office lad said, not more than two or three days. Again Miss Alwyne called, and this time got the note, but still a week had elapsed from Roy's committal before it came into Janita's hands. A weary week for Bessie, whose

heart ached with remorse for her cruel words; a weary week for Roy in his prison home, beggared, as he thought, of that beautiful human love which can make even a prison bright.

The morning after she got the note, Janita sent for a cab, and drove down to St. Olave's with Bessie Ashton. Miss Hepzibah had great misgivings about the propriety of the affair. It was unwomanly, she thought. The maiden author of the *Guide to Female Excellence* would have deprecated such a proceeding as reprehensible in the highest degree; and for her own part, Miss Hepzibah was quite sure that, when she was a girl, things were very different, *her* mother would never have allowed her to do such a thing. But for once in her life Miss Hepzibah had to give way.

"Aunt, I must do it."

And something in Janita's tone, in the strange startling earnestness of her young face, silenced the inexorable spinster. Janita had never looked or spoken in that way before.

So they started. Ah! what a different journey it was from the last which Bessie had made, six months ago, to the old city, that afternoon when she and Roy first held each other's hand under the

grey pollard willows by the haling-bank road. Then the March sun was shining cheerily on the little half-opened buds which covered the elm trees with a soft olive tint, and the skylarks sprung up from the brown fields and carolled a merry song, whilst she and her lover walked by the dyke side, talking of all the joy that life should bring them, feeling as if no angry word, no thought even of distrust or suspicion could ever part them any more. And she remembered, as they reached the city and passed by the gaol on their way to the street where Mr. Hastings lived, how she had looked up to the grim frowning walls with an undefined dread which had never quite died out since the time when she was a little child, and used to be frightened into submission by threats of being shut up in the "prison-hole." Now Roy, her lover, he who should have been her husband, was there in that same "prison-hole," waiting his trial for murder; perhaps waiting his death; and she was going to see him. Those grim gates would close upon her by and by; she would have to face the rude stare of gaolers and turnkeys, of prisoners too, whose hands were black with crime and their faces foul with guilt.

The poor girl was trembling all over, but Janita spoke not a word to her. She knew that no help but God's could strengthen Bessie for the holy, beautiful work which he had given her to do. And she knew, too, that when that work was done, there would come into the poor tired heart that great peace which duty accomplished never fails to leave.

On they went, over the smooth turnpike road, past green pastures where sheep browsed and patient cattle sheltered from the autumn breeze; beneath fast thinning hedgerows, past barley fields where reapers were binding the latest sheaves of harvest. Then past Mrs. Canon Crumpet's elegant villa, and little clumps of suburban residences, which seemed to have rooted themselves round the parent city like green suckers round a gnarled old tree that is ready to drop for very age and rottenness. Soon the cab wheels jolted upon the stony pavement of St. Olave's, and the great Minster front looked down upon them, the sun-light tipping its airy pinnacles and flashing from its traceried windows.

A few more turnings brought them to the gateway of the gaol. After a great rattling of bolts

and chains, the iron-spiked door was thrown open, and closed again when they had passed it, with a clang that seemed to make the whole place shake.

They found themselves now in a square courtyard, surrounded by high stone walls whose tops were guarded by thickly planted iron spikes. From this court-yard a second gateway, bolted and chained like the first, led them into another inclosure, in one corner of which stood the governor's residence, looking like a prison itself with its massive battlements and narrow grated windows. There they got out, and after waiting for some time in a cell-like gloomy room, the governor came to them.

He was a tall, grave man, not harsh exactly in his manner, but very stern, and with that autocratic bearing which is acquired by men who are placed in positions of authority, especially when that authority has to be exercised over criminals. Bessie thought she had never seen anything so awful as his look, when, after reading the magistrate's note of admission, he peered into her face as if searching there for the share she had had in Roy's crime. That look made her tremble again.

"You are the young woman, I suppose, who has been sent to see the prisoner."

Bessie's lips moved, but she was far too frightened to speak. And it seemed to send such a chill through her to hear her own brave Roy, Roy who had been so kind and good to her, spoken of in that way as "the prisoner."

The governor rang the bell. A turnkey appeared, with a great bunch of keys hanging to his girdle, clanking at every step which he took on the stone pavement.

"Bring Number Ninety-seven out of the second ward of untried prisoners, into the gaoler's private room, and then come back and take this young woman to him. She is to stay half an hour. You are to wait at the door and bring her back into this office again."

The turnkey went away. After a few minutes, which seemed like an hour to poor Bessie, trembling all the time under the governor's stern scrutiny, she heard his bunch of keys clanking up the long corridor.

"Young woman, follow me."

Bessie had never been spoken to in that way before. It was worse than even Miss Hepzibah's

interminable scold. If she had been a prisoner herself, convicted of the worst of crimes, the voice need not have been more harsh. Choking back the tears which were ready to rain down her cheeks, she followed the man through a long stone passage, in which several policemen were loitering about, one or two of whom stared rudely at her, and whispered—"sweetheart," "uncommon pretty;" past wards of convicted felons, who crowded to the grated doors to get a sight of her, and into a long corridor lined on each side with doorways, all numbered and studded with iron nails. The turnkey opened one of these.

"Walk forward, young woman. You've got half an hour to stop."

Then he shut the door after her with a resounding clang. Once more she and Roy stood in each other's presence.

It was a small square room, the floor, roof, and sides composed of single blocks of stone. A very narrow window, crossed with iron bars, looked into a ward where some felons were pacing up and down, chained in couples, and guarded by policemen. There was a table in the room and two chairs, all fastened to the floor by clamps of iron. Opposite

to her, with his back to the window, stood Roy, erect, noble as ever. There was no brand of guilt on that clear forehead, no shame of evil deeds in the brave, straightforward glance of the keen blue eyes. Calm as if it was his own cottage home at Meadowthorpe, and no prison cell, in which he stood. "Hardened," as Abigail said to Miss Hepzibah only a week ago. Yes, very hardened.

But Bessie scarcely saw him. Her eyes were fixed on the floor. There was a choking sensation in her throat, her fingers clasped each other nervously under her grey plaid shawl. She did not know how he looked. She could not tell whether there was anger or forgiveness in the face which was turned upon her now. She only knew that she had wronged him very much, and that in some way or other she must find words to ask his pardon. And soon too. Even now she could hear the gaoler's step outside, every footfall telling off a moment from the little spell of time in which her work must be done.

"Roy," she began, very falteringly at first, but gathering strength as she went on—"Roy, I dare say you'll be surprised to see me.—But Miss Jane got me a note to come. I wanted to tell you that

I'm very sorry I angered you so that afternoon in the Hall field.—It was very wrong of me, and I hope you'll forgive me, and not think any more about it. And—and there was something else I wanted to say to you. I wanted to tell you that I never loved anyone but you, and I love you just the same now as ever I did. I couldn't be happy any more until I'd told you this."

They had come nearer to each other as she spoke. Now he held out his arms. There was no need for words to say that he forgave her, no need for even one look to tell the deep love he bore her. She came and felt herself held closely to him, more closely than ever she had been held before. Standing there, heart to heart, there came over them both that perfect peace, which no prison bars, nor even death itself, can keep back from those who love each other faithfully.

By and by Bessie lifted up her face to look at him. Then she saw how changed he was in that one little week. They had cut off nearly all his hair, the beautiful curling hair that she used to be so proud of. They had put on him the coarse, ill-fitting prison garb, which marred, though it could not spoil, the grand outlines of his figure. And his

face wore already the deep lines of pain, that mental pain which is so hard to bear, which stamps upon the finest features an impress, which no after-joy can take away.

Bessie would have left him then, but he held her fast. She had always been dear to him, but never so dear as now ; this simple village girl, who in his hours of prosperity had been so coy and coquettish, so slow to tell her love, so wilful and petulant ; but who was not ashamed to claim him now that prison walls parted them, and the stain of murder lay upon his name, the name he had always worn so proudly. Only on his name though, not upon his soul. No, thank God, not there. And she must know this.

“Bessie,” he said, “I never told you a lie yet.”

“No, Roy, you never did.”

“And I never will. And so I say now, as I shall maybe say it by and by before God and the holy angels, that I never did Peter Monk any hurt, that he died from no act of mine. Do you believe this, Bessie ?”

“Yes, Roy. I do believe you. And people may say what they like, but I never will believe anything but that.”

“I know he hated me, Bessie, and may God

forgive me if I often had evil thoughts of him. It's hard to think ought else of a man as is trying to win from you what you love best in all the world; and he was trying to win you from me, wasn't he, Bessie?"

No answer, but only the touch of Bessie's lips upon his hand. And that touch told that, come what might, no one should ever win her from him now.

"Bessie, darling, I never misdoubted you while that night I saw you dancing with Peter Monk. I always did think you loved me, though you was over shy to say it straight out, as a many would have done. But when I stood behind that old elm-tree in the Hall field and saw him leading you up and down among the rest of 'em, and you looking so bright and happy——"

"No, Roy, I wasn't happy."

"Weren't you, darling? Well, I'm glad of it, for I shouldn't like to think as you was the girl to be made happy by a man like him. But I did think when I seed you together, well maybe it's better so. Maybe she'd rather wed a man who can always go about with the outside show of a gentleman, than me as has to tew hard and wear a rough

suit. And then, Bessie, I know it was a wicked thought, but I did feel as if I could have killed him. It was so hard to see him 'ticing you away from me, and you so pleased like with his fine London ways, and yet to know all the time that he was a man as would never bring you to nought but misery. But you won't go to London now, Bessie, will you?"

"No, Roy, I won't. And I don't want to go anywhere, only you go with me. And then I don't care where it is that I go."

"Please God it shall be so," said Roy, solemnly. Holding her as he did then, hearing her words of loving truth, knowing that at last she was all his own,—death, the death that might be so near, seemed very bitter.

"But," he continued, still keeping her close by him, "I must tell you the rest. We had some words, Peter Monk and me, after I'd seen him dancing with you, and then I went away down to father's garden. I'd been there a good bit when I looked up and seed him sitting on the willow stump by the second Hall field. He'd got something up to his face as if he was drinking, but I was over far off to see exact what it was. And when he got

up to come along again, I set off to the other end of the garden, for I didn't want to get speech of him any more. That was the last time I ever seed him. After that I stopped a long time in the garden, trying to look straight at things, and saying to myself over and over again, to get used to it in a manner, 'Bessie's forsaken me. Bessie's going to London with Peter Monk.' And I thought that if God let things go that way, it wasn't for me to find fault with 'em, for He shapes the world His own way, and He'll bring it out right at last, without us helping Him on with our bits o' notions. So I tried to forgive Peter Monk, and not be so hard upon him ; but oh ! Bessie ! I couldn't. I couldn't frame nought but bitterness agen him. I heard the church clock strike nine, and then ten, and eleven, and twelve, and when it struck twelve I remembered that mother would be waiting for me, and thinking something was up, for I was never used to being late of a night. And then I set off home, and mother looked hard at me, but I couldn't tell her nought. I felt as if I didn't care to say nothing to nobody. Next thing I heard was that Peter Monk had been found drowned in the dyke. Poor fellow, I didn't wish him such ill-luck as that.

It's a cold bed for anyone is yon slime and sedge, with the eels crawling over you, and the muddy river weed winding round and round. I'd be sorry to see anyone laid there. And Monk shouldn't ha' laid there either if I could have given a hand to help him out. Nay, Bessie, darling, I didn't mean to make you cry about it," he continued, for Bessie's tears were falling fast now. But a sudden thought came over him. Perhaps those tears might be for Peter Monk. "Bessie," he said, "tell me truly. It's the last time I shall ever ask you. Did you love Peter Monk?"

Bessie had never moved her face from his arm all the time that he was speaking. Now she lifted it up, and there was a little pride shining through her tears.

"No, Roy. I did not love Peter Monk. I was foolish enough to be pleased when he told me I was the best-looking girl in the parish, and I was sort o' proud to go down the street with him, because he looked more of a gentleman than other folks did; but I didn't care for him all the time, no, I'm sure I didn't, and I never did love anybody but you, Roy, and people may say what they will

of you, and the worst may come that can come, I shall always do the same."

"Bless you for that, Bessie!"

A beam of sunlight came in through the barred window just then, and rested upon both of them as they stood there, side by side. But Roy and Bessie in their prison cell needed no brightness that it could give them. Let it go to the Hall at Meadowthorpe, sunbeams were much wanted there. The gaoler rattled at the door with his bunch of keys.

"Time's up, young woman."

"Good-bye, Roy."

"Good-bye, Bessie."

And then for the first time in all their lives they looked into each other's eyes with a long, long look of trust, perfect trust, such trust as even life itself might be laid down to win. After that she left him.

The turnkey might stare rudely at her; the policemen might whisper their remarks as she passed; the felons might leer upon her with guilty, gloating looks. Bessie could not tell if they did. When she reached the governor's room again, Janita, who was waiting for her there, knew by the smile upon her white, tear-stained face, that the worst was over; that whatever else

might come, no evil could come to them now, having faith in each other.

So they went back again to the Aspens, where the blackbirds were singing in the apple-tree branches, and the canary twittering in his cage outside the window; where Miss Hepzibah was skimming syrup to preserve her apricots, and Abigail was scouring pans in the back kitchen. After that day Bessie went about her work as usual, a little paler and quieter than before, but polishing spoons and washing up glasses and waiting at table quite as well as ever. In fact, Miss Hepzibah thought better than ever, for now the girl wasn't always breaking off work to run to that window that looked out into the square, and never loitered on her errands, or got into bad tempers with the plain cook.

And Roy waited patiently in his prison cell, and day by day the November Assizes drew nearer, no one knowing whether or not at their close the scaffold would be put up outside the gaol walls, and the death bell rung whilst a gaping multitude feasted their eyes upon the ghastly paraphernalia of execution, and watched the dying throes of the hangman's victim.

CHAPTER VI.



HE village of Meadowthorpe soon went back to its usual sedate habits, after Noelline's wedding day. The free seats, which had been removed to allow the bridal procession to pass up the church aisle, were replaced. The festive garlands, which poor Roy had helped to arrange, were torn down, and the props cut up for firewood. The triumphal arches at the Hall and church gates, those arches whose gay devices had cost Ben Royland's garden its choicest dahlias and geraniums, were pulled to pieces, and the flowers besomed into Meadowthorpe dyke, whose slow current floated them in process of time to St. Olave's. And there the little boys fished them out with sticks, after which they were carried home and stuck into glass bottles, and placed as

ornaments in the dingy windows of the dingy back streets of that dingy old city.

Almost before the last laurel festoon had faded, or the bridal bouquets lost all their fragrance, that "sad affair of poor Monk's" was quite forgotten. Roy wore away his days in St. Olave's goal, unremembered save by one or two who wept for him and prayed for him ; his father and mother, Bessie, Janita, Miss Alwyne, not many more than these, unless, perhaps, the new steward cast a thought upon him as he sat alone in the splendid Hall dining-room. Some said that visit of Mr. Rivers to London was connected with Roy, that he had gone up to engage counsel for the trial which was to take place in November. But no one knew exactly, for the steward was so very quiet and reserved, so different to his charming sister, who took the whole village into her confidence and never appeared to have any secrets from any one.

The affair was discussed at Mrs. Narrowby's working party the week after the wedding, when that supreme event itself had been talked threadbare. It—the murder—was a very shocking thing, Mrs. Narrowby said, very shocking indeed. She hoped it would be a warning to all the young

men of Meadowthorpe not to give way to such ungovernable tempers. She had got a tract down from St. Olave's, "The Murderer Convicted," which she intended to circulate in her district, with a view to impressing the minds of the lower classes with the heinousness of the crime which had been perpetrated amongst them by one of their own number. And she had spoken to Mr. Mabury about improving the event at church by a series of discourses, anything from the pulpit came with so much weight. But Mr. Mabury thought it would be better to defer any pulpit reference until after the young man was executed, or, at any rate, until after he was sentenced, as then he should be able to enter more at large upon the evil effects of unbridled passion, a subject on which he was already turning over a few thoughts.

Miss Vere Aubrey said that it had given her nerves quite a shock. She had been obliged to call in medical advice. Such depravity was appalling, especially in a quiet village like Meadowthorpe. And coming immediately after the wedding day, too; but no doubt the young man had been maturing his plans for some time, knowing that poor Monk would be down from London

to see the merrymaking. There really appeared to be no limit to the wickedness of some people. The village morality had received a stain which, like that of Rizzio's blood, could never be effaced. And then, with a perceptible accession of stateliness, Miss Vere Aubrey requested one of the lower class fellow-Christians to pass her a pair of scissors.

Mrs. Mabury was most impressed with the hardened demeanour of the criminal. It was so very distressing. But surely he would confess before the sentence was carried into effect. She hoped the chaplain would pay every attention to his state of mind. It was so shocking for a criminal to be executed without confessing. And, of course, no one had the slightest doubt of his guilt. At least, every one who expressed an opinion on the subject said that the young man was sure to be hanged. Mr. Rivers was the only person who reserved judgment. But then Mr. Rivers was so very silent. No one could ever tell what Mr. Rivers thought about anything.

Yes, Mrs. Maguire said that Mr. Rivers was very silent, very silent indeed. Could Mrs. Mabury tell her whether there was any truth in the

report that the new steward had been visiting at St. Olave's Deanery rather attentively of late? She had heard a whisper that something was going on in that direction, and no one was so likely to be correctly informed as Mrs. Mabury, who had connections in the Close. Was there anything in it, now?

Whereupon Mrs. Mabury smiled pleasantly, and said, that, of course, she should not like it mentioned publicly as the affair was so very recent, but she had every reason to believe that there would be a wedding in the Close before long, and that Meadowthorpe Hall would be called upon to welcome a new mistress. A very suitable one, too, for every one knew that Miss Somers was admirably qualified to sustain the position of any gentleman to whom she united herself in marriage. She was so exceedingly dignified and self-possessed, to say nothing of her charming temper and the handsome fortune which she inherited from the first Mrs. Somers.

Aud when once that subject was launched, a tide of curiosity set in from upper-class fellow-christianity, which drifted poor Roy far away into the region of forgetfulness.

Mrs. Colonel Gore was enjoying her wedding-tour very much, so she said to Miss Somers in a letter dated from Paris. They were going up the Rhine, and then into Italy, to Rome and Naples and Venice. After that they should stay a few days in Paris again on their return home, when she should try to get a Cashmere shawl for dear Elene. Paris was such a charming place for shawls, such variety, such beautiful designs, and the price so reasonable, too; though, of course, dear Elene would not mind about that. And then, after a little chatter about the Louvre, and the fine pictures, and the Parisian women, Noelline sent her love to all the dear Meadowthorpe people. She should never forget the kindness she had received from them, especially Mrs. Narrowby, who really had been quite a mother to her, so exceedingly confidential and friendly. It was quite a possession to have such a friend as Mrs. Narrowby. And the dear Misses Narrowby, too, who were so good and useful, would Elene remember her most affectionately to the dear Misses Narrowby, and also to Janita Raeburn? She knew that Elene did not visit at the Aspens, but if she gave the message to any of the Narrowbys, they would for-

ward it to Miss Raeburn, "the families are so very intimate, you know, almost united already." And pray when was that wedding going to take place—the wedding that had been talked about so long, even before she left Meadowthorpe? At which, for of course Elene read the letter to Cecilia Narrowby, the diamond-shaped young lady smiled, and said she should rejoice to welcome Miss Raeburn as a sister, she knew no one who would suit Longden so well, and she really felt as if the Professor's niece were already one of themselves, they all loved her so much.

Next time Mr. Rivers went to St. Olave's Deanery, the letter was read to him; and when she came to the wedding paragraph, Elene told him Miss Narrowby's annotation thereupon, adding a little bit out of her own imagination, to the effect that the affair must be drawing very near now, for Miss Raeburn had been seen in one of the outfitting establishments at St. Olave's, which was a sure sign. Most likely, too, Mr. Longden intended to establish himself in Exeter, as his mother once hinted to Mrs. Gore, which was the reason they heard nothing about house-taking and furnishing.

Mr. Rivers did not smile at the intelligence as

Cecilia Narrowby had done, but he said it would be a very suitable match, very suitable indeed, everything that could be wished on both sides. And then he began to walk up and down the long drawing-room, looking remarkably grave, as he often looked now, whilst Elene, as she watched him grinding his patent boots into the expensive velvet-pile carpet, resolved that when she was married she would take an early opportunity of speaking to Gavin about that habit he had got into of walking up and down rooms; it was so very destructive to a good carpet, and so annoying, especially to ladies who had never been accustomed to anything of that kind.

The new steward, returning from his rides over the estate, often saw Longden Narrowby going into the Aspens just about tea-time, sometimes with a book under his arm, sometimes with a roll of paper which looked very much like music, most likely a duet which they were going to practise together, as their voices suited each other so charmingly. And often when Gavin was sitting in Mr. Narrowby's office at the Duke's yard, looking over plans and proposed alterations, the young man would point out in quite a chance, accidental way, some im-

provement which had been suggested to him in this or that design. Miss Raeburn had said how nicely a Tudor window might be placed in the end cottage on the Muchmarsh road, and how that entrance to the village would be beautified by the planting of a double row of Italian poplars, like those which had been placed in the old steward's time along the Dykeland causeway. Or he just happened to go across with Julia to the Professor's one evening not long ago, and Miss Raeburn sketched him a design for the new gardens which they were laying out on the waste land, beyond Meadowthorpe Marsh. "You know, Mr. Rivers, everyone allows that Miss Raeburn has perfect taste in all such things as these," Longden would say, and then throw the sketch across for the steward to examine.

Such indications as these, together with many others equally trifling and suggestive, made it evident that a change was impending at the Aspens; though Gavin Rivers could not help thinking sometimes that had he been in young Narrowby's place, he could not have handled Janita's name so carelessly, or spoken with such *insouciance*, with such an unembarrassed air of the confidences

which passed between them. But then people thought differently about these things. Of course Miss Raeburn was nothing to him, nothing at all. There was no need that he should trouble himself about any possibilities or probabilities connected with her. Elene Somers, soft, serene, tranquil, like some full-bosomed fleecy cloud, floating through the blue depths of a summer sky, was far better fitted to be the mistress of his home, the guardian of its peace, than that sensitive, wayward little Janita, fitful as April sunshine, sometimes trustful, sometimes shy, whose pretty ways had so fascinated him only a few weeks ago; whose falseness too had stung him so bitterly.

That was what Gavin Rivers said to himself, forcing back any lingering doubts by his sister's clear, emphatic words—"Mrs. Narrowby told me so herself." It was all right. Of course it was all right. And yet—. He picked up the sketch which Longden had thrown across to him, and, under pretence of looking over it at his leisure, with a view to having the suggested improvements carried into effect, he took it to his own little office room at the Hall; where he pondered over it for nearly an hour, Araby, the black mare, standing

at the garden gate all the time, saddled and bridled in readiness for a canter to St. Olave's Deanery.

But still, when the new steward's engagement was made public—which publication took place shortly after the working party at Gablehouse—everyone said what a very excellent match it was on both sides. Miss Somers would make such a charming mistress for Meadowthorpe Hall. She had such a stately presence, such dignified self-possessed manners; she was so amiable, too, would accommodate herself so readily to any little peculiarities of temper. For though Mr. Rivers was very much respected in Meadowthorpe, no one more so, yet it could not be denied that he was peculiar rather, and these peculiarities had increased lately. It was well that he knew his own failings, and sought as his wife a lady who would bear with him patiently. Yes, it was an excellent match. Even Mrs. Narrowby was constrained to say that, with the exception of her own girls, any of whom, as regarded temper and disposition, would have suited him very well, Mr. Rivers could not have chosen more judiciously, or better secured his own happiness, than by placing the Dean's daughter in the position she was destined to occupy.

There was no need then for him to be so fitful and moody. No need for him to withdraw from general society, to decline all the friendly dinners and quadrille parties and supper engagements which the good people of Meadowthorpe—especially when Miss Somers was visiting at the Rectory—pressed upon him. No need whatever for him to wear the Hall carpets into thin places with pacing up and down them for hours together; or to go moping along by the dykeside with his hands behind him, as Dr. Maguire had seen him moping night after night, when the autumn damps were falling, and regard for his health would have kept him at his own fireside.

Perhaps it was in one of these lonely walks by the dykeside that Gavin Rivers found, half buried amongst the black rotting leaves and slimy duckweed, a flask with the initials P. M. scratched upon it. He sent it to Roy's counsel, and Roy's counsel took it to the tailoring establishment at the west end, where it was identified by a shopman as the same which Peter Monk usually carried about with him, filled with spirits.

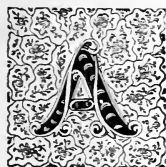
But no doubt the steward felt his sister's loss very much. It was the loss of his sister, so the Meadowthorpe people said, that made him se-

clude himself so much from general society, and look so very sombre and moody when he did make his appearance in public. Miss Rivers was such a charming woman, so kind and winning. He must miss her very much indeed. A woman like Miss Rivers, leaving any home, must take away much of its sunshine with her. The Square people were quite sure of that. Then she was so devoted to him, studied his welfare in every thing, always spoke so sweetly to him, had told her friends over and over again that it was the dearest wish of her heart to see him comfortably settled with a wife who would more than supply her place to him—in short, she was everything that a sister could be. He must indeed be very lonely now that her voice no longer made music in his home, and her sweet face no longer moved like sunshine through those great deserted rooms. Yes, no wonder that the new steward appeared dispirited at times.

But all would be right when the new year came in, and the bells of Meadowthorpe church rang out once more a merry bridal peal, and the Hall welcomed a new mistress, with smiles of liveried servants, and fluttering of white favours, and shouting of village children. All would be right then.

So Gentility Square said.

CHAPTER VII.



AND what of Janita?—poor Janita whose trouble had to be borne alone; for whom there was no friend to be to her what she had been to Bessie Ashton—the bringer of peace and reconciliation. What of poor Janita?

Some one has said that there is in the history of every true soul, a valley of the shadow of death, through which it must needs journey to perfect rest. To this valley Janita had come. She went through it as all do, alone, telling no one of the terrors she met and conquered, asking help from none but God. When at last light came, it was to reveal a quite new life, one out of which happiness had gone, that something nobler than happiness might take its place.

Often in the darkness of night a traveller, home-

ward bound, crosses the frontier of a new country, and finds at sunrise, instead of level plains and golden harvest fields, only rocky defiles, pine forests within whose shadow many a noisome beast may lurk, and fir-clad mountains steep and hard to climb, but from whose summits, once reached, he may see that which the level plain hid from him—his native land, the home whither he is journeying.

Janita had left the smooth plains and golden harvest fields. She had crossed the frontier line. Before her stretched the rugged mountain path, beyond that—heaven, rest, home.

But they were far off. She could not see them now. All that she could see was the rugged mountain path, steep and hard to climb. Far away behind her, gone for ever now, the sunshine and the happiness and the hope which belong only to the blessed season of youth. Could the future give her anything like what the past had taken? Janita thought not.

She had been unwise. She had made what society calls a great mistake. Unconsciously, she had ventured her all and lost it. For the last six months her life had been just one pleasant dream. Now the waking had come. A hard waking, full

of humiliation and bitterness. Oh, to have swept out the whole memory of the past, all its sunshine, all its brightness! Oh, to have purchased with forgetfulness of joy, forgetfulness of sorrow, too! If she could but have put away the whole of that Meadowthorpe life, and gone back to the dear old Inverallan home, where none of these things ever came, where she was happy without knowing it, where grief, when it came at all, was kissed away before it had time to leave one bitter memory behind. Oh, if she had never left Inverallan! Why could they not have let her stay in the old, old home? But it was too late now.

And then she remembered those words of Miss Alwyne's, spoken long ago, words which seemed so empty of meaning when she in her young hopefulness first listened to them.

"If that will should one day meet you as a cross, heavy and hard to bear, carry it bravely, carry it patiently. It is but for a little while. There is no cross so borne which He who gave it will not one day exchange for an eternal crown."

This was her cross, then. Janita looked through the coming years, those years from which all joy

and hope had been swept away ; and beyond them she saw the crown.

These thoughts passed through the young girl's mind as she sat in Miss Alwyne's little attic room one Sunday evening, listlessly gazing over the village to Meadowthorpe marsh and the dyke, whose course she could trace by long lines of grey pollard willows. Sunset was steeping the marshes in purple and crimson, and brightening the old gables of the Hall, just as it had brightened them two months ago. But Janita had better not think any more about that evening two months ago. To remember it now could do no good. She must learn to forget. Some people find that lesson hard ; so might she. Still, it must be learned.

Whilst she sat there in her little attic study, Gavin Rivers was sauntering in the Deanery garden with the fair lady so soon to be his wife, and Mrs. Colonel Gore, who was a regular attendant on the outward means of grace, was kneeling side by side with her husband in a fashionable London church ; her velvet-covered prayer-book open before her at that portion of the service in which good people pray that all who profess and call themselves Christians may hold the faith in

the bond of peace and in righteousness of life. If some of the "amens" to that prayer were more heartfelt, none were so musical as Mrs. Gore's.

Yes, Janita, it does seem wrong that you should ever have left Inverallan, the manse home where you might have been so happy. For no fault of yours, either. You were content, you were very happy. Agnes loved you as a sister, you were far more than any sister to Willie Home. It does seem wrong that you should be starving now for the love which would never have failed you there.

But have patience. As Larry Stead said at the little band-meeting in Mrs. Cloudie's cottage only a week ago—

"There's a vast o' things i' this here world as beats the best on us to know why they was let to go on. And with all our spelling and contriving, we can't make no sense of 'em. We're just like a set o' little bairns as scarce knows their letters, tewing wi' a long bible chapter an' forgetting what one verse says afore we get to t' middle o' t' next. Poor little bairns! they'll read it better by and by, nobbut their patience houlds out. And this thought's been much laid upon my mind of a late.

It's a dark road and a rough un too, as God Almighty puts some on us to travel, heaps o' stones and pitfalls, and never a light to show us where they are. But it's a Father's hand leads us, and all as we've got to do is to keep a strong grip on it. A strong grip, that's all, and we'll get safe through afore long."

Plain words, but wrapping up a great truth.

Little by little Janita came to know somewhat of this truth. Hitherto, she had thought of life as a thing that is only meant to bring joy, never anything else but joy. Now, she learned the lesson, always very painful and bitter to be learned, that joy is not God's only purpose for us here; that He sends His children into the world to do and suffer, that only through doing and suffering true nobility of character is won. Joy is often the last link in the chain, a link which we never see until heaven shows it to us. What she had to do now was to go on steadily through the gloom, knowing that though the way might be long and the night dark, a Father's hand was strong to uphold and a Father's wisdom true to guide. Leaving the sunshine behind, going once more into the old track of duty, never faltering over any work

which he gave her to do, there might come at last, even to her, that light which is sown for the upright.

Perhaps her life might not be very happy any more, but it might always be worthy, always full of good fruits, both for herself and others. One thing was certain, she need not waste it in regret for the past. And since, by God's purpose, some doors in her heart were closed, some rooms there empty and unfurnished, she would fill with richer adorning those of which she still held the key. Then, when heaven at last gave what earth denied, she should find that she had lost nothing in what here seemed so great a loss. In that upper world her life would not be less beautiful because here it was but half lived.

Courage, then, Janita. There may be much sweetness in store for you yet, much deep quiet-hearted content when you have travelled far enough to see the bright side of the cloud which now shows you only its gloom. Nothing but its gloom. The time may come when the steward of Meadowthorpe would give all he has, home, wealth, everything, to win that peace which you will win by and by, the peace of a heart at rest with itself and God.

It is an old story, that of the Peruvian silver mines. We have read how the runaway slave, hunted by his pursuers, fled up the mountain side, and clinging to the branches of a young sapling which grew there, tore it from the ground and discovered at its roots the precious metal which revealed Potosi's untold wealth. That young sapling was never planted again. It might have lived for many and many a year on the fertile mountain side; birds might have built their nests in the branches of it, and weary travellers slept beneath its shade. But it told of the mines of Peru. That was enough. A nobler work that, than sheltering weary travellers, or fluttering young green leaves in the sunshine. And having done its work, they let it die.

So, in many a human heart, the rude hand of disappointment, tearing up the bright flowers of hope and promise, finds at their roots the shining ore which tells of silver beneath. And when that wealth is won, who shall mourn if the flowers that might have been so fair, wither unheeded on the ground whose treasure they have died to reveal.

Wait, Janita. If the flowers are dead, the silver is there still.

CHAPTER VIII.



HERE is no month so pleasant as October in some parts of this fair land of ours. October with its sil-
ver mists marking the river's course,
its red sunsets flushing the far off mountains, its
crisp frosty mornings when gossamer films spangled
with dew drops embroider every wild rose stem
and bramble bush ; its afternoons steeped in golden
sunshine, those warm, serene, deliciously lazy after-
noons when you may saunter up and down your
garden for hours together amongst richly-tinted
autumn flowers, hearing no sound save the chirp of
a solitary bird or the rustle of an over-ripe chestnut
that falls through thinning branches to the sere
leaves below. No time so pleasant as the October
time.

But October at Meadowthorpe was by no means

a month of delights. There autumn never laid his "fiery finger" on the leaves. All that he did was to stain them a dull sickly yellow, after which they rotted and fell, without passing through any of those intermediate tints of russet or crimson which glow upon hillside and mountain foliage. And before the last of these yellow leaves had rotted, whilst yet here and there a few hung like fluttering pennons from the topmost twigs of the elm-trees, Dykeland marsh began to pour its slow tide of malaria through the village, stealing into many a cottage home, breathing its poisonous breath into many a stalwart labourer or rosy-cheeked maiden, sucking the precious life out of merry children and grey-haired men alike. The death-bell used to toll more frequently, almost every day fever victims were carried into Meadowthorpe churchyard, whilst others, whose time had not yet come, struggled back again to health through weeks and months of slow dull pain. Just as Janita Raeburn had struggled last year at this time.

But Meadowthorpe village, especially the upper portion of it, managed to make a pleasant thing of life, notwithstanding death-bells and malaria. As the season advanced, Gentility Square began to

think about a change of bonnets. People who had conveyances drove into St. Olave's and looked round the milliners' shops. The Misses Narrowby held many a cabinet council on the respective merits of velvet and plush. The Aubrey House ladies considered how their decaying charms might best be enhanced by an artistic arrangement of winter colours. For Norman features fade even as the humble Saxon do, and a pedigree that stretches ages away will not secure its possessor against crows' feet and withering cheeks. Miss Hepzibah, too, turned over her old boxes of trimmings, and spent many precious hours in devising how they might most cheaply be converted into a wearable shape.

One thing Miss Hepzibah had determined. She would set her face against the torrent of worldliness which had overflowed feminine Meadowthorpe since the advent of that Paris milliner in the High Street of St. Olave's, that Paris milliner who was always inviting ladies to go and inspect the fashions, and tempting Gentility Square with bonnets made after the same model as those worn by royal or imperial leaders of style. Accordingly, Miss Hepzibah had her last year's chip dipped brown, and

trimmed by a native genius with ribbon to match, brown strings, brown bows, brown interior arrangements—everything brown. Janita did venture to suggest the expediency of a contrast inside, just one little touch of colour to relieve the general sombre hue, but the Professor's sister was immovable on that point. Brown she had decided upon, and brown it should be. She was resolved to set an example to the parish, let others do as they might.

Brown it was therefore. And when Miss Hepzibah went to church next Sunday, she could scarcely give her mind to the sermon for thinking how consistent she was. She was of opinion, moreover, that Mr. Mabury ought to feel very much obliged to her for letting her light shine in that way. She was quite sure that whatever else might happen, no evil tempers would be roused by *her* bonnet, no precious afternoon leisure wasted in comments upon it, no remarks provoked by it which would prevent their makers from coming to the sacrament next time in a state of love and charity with all men.

Poor Miss Hepzibah was never so much mistaken in her life. Since that eventful Sunday, the third Sunday in March, when the Hall family came to

church for the first time, no bonnet had produced more excitement or been so ruthlessly criticised by the Gentility Square people, male and female, as they chatted over their wine and cracked their after-dinner walnuts. The Professor's sister, snoring more peacefully than usual in her arm-chair, because of the conviction that neither envy, hatred, nor malice had been roused by her consistent browniness, forgot that these are not the only unchristian dispositions extant, and that by provoking the scorn and contempt of the upper class "faithful handmaids," she had called into action quite as reprehensible a set of emotions as though she had goaded them into a breach of the tenth commandment by the most expensive piece of decoration that Paris ingenuity could devise. But you might have talked the length of many sermons to Miss Hepzibah, even had she been awake, before any such conviction as this would find lodgment in her mind.

If Gentility Square laughed at her, however, that was all it did. Bonnet after bonnet, each more sumptuous than any that had preceded it, bloomed out in the green baize pews, until, before November was over, Mr. Mabury shed his benediction upon as brilliant a display of flowers,

plumes, and streamers, as any that a metropolitan chapel of ease, even in the height of the London season, could have produced. So much for Miss Hepzibah's well-intentioned efforts towards reforming the parish.

The rector's lady did not buy her bonnet with the rest of the Meadowthorpe people. She would wait, so she said to her sister Emily Graham, until the great ball which was always held in St. Olave's during the assizes. She should get Eustace to drive her into town on the morning of the ball, when the principal members of the county families were to be seen loitering in the fashionable streets; and after looking round amongst them, she should find out what was likely to be worn, and shape her course accordingly. That ball was so very convenient, it always brought the county families to town, and the St. Olave's county families dressed in such perfect taste, you could never do wrong in copying the county families.

The rector's lady would not have very long to wait for her new bonnet. The November Assizes were rapidly drawing near. Already the workmen had begun to decorate the Hall of Guild in readiness for the ball. Tracking your way through

the dim little streets, you were met at every turn by announcements of concerts, lectures, theatrical performances, and various other amusements with which St. Olave's teemed during the assize week. Those people, too, who had lodgings to let, got their best linen out, and their best curtains put up, and placed neat little cards in the front windows, advertising their willingness to accommodate parties on reasonable terms. Wreaths and silver-spangled robes found their way into the High Street drapers' shops, dressmakers began to be "almost run off their feet," a general bustle and flurry and excitement announced that St. Olave's was about to go through its biennial episode of gaiety.

Roy would not wear away many more days of suspense in his prison cell. Bessie Aslton would not go about her work much longer with that sad submissive look on her sweet face, sweeter now than it had been in the old time of unstained happiness. Death or liberty—no one could tell which—was near at hand. Then the smile would come back to Bessie's face, she would work away more cheerily than ever at the humble little wedding preparations; or—but how would Bessie bear it if the worst came, if the death-bell

did ring, and the scaffold were built, and a gaping multitude gathered to gloat upon the throes of some one there ?

For, as Mr. Narrowby, rubbing his hands briskly, never failed to say when he met Miss Raeburn, "The case is very dark, very dark case ; everything going against the young man, very dark indeed."

So one pleasant Tuesday morning, after a fanfare of trumpets and a great clanging of cathedral bells had heralded the arrival of the judges, and when clusters of noble-looking women and tall, distinguished men, promenading St. Olave's streets, proclaimed that the county ball was near at hand, Mr. Mabury drove his wife over to town and escorted her through the principal streets, where the rector's lady perceived that coloured velvet bonnets, with drooping crowns, were likely to be fashionable. Then, leaving her husband to enjoy himself amongst a few of his old college friends, she went to the Paris milliner's and selected a ruby velvet, whose like had never been seen in Meadowthorpe parish within the memory of the oldest inhabitant. That important business being accomplished to her entire satisfaction, Mrs. Mabury

proceeded to call upon Mrs. Herbert Lees, daughter of the governor, to inquire if dear Mrs. Lees could be so kind as to get her two or three orders for the magistrate's box when this trial of young Royland's came on. She was so very anxious to hear it, and so was Mrs. Narrowby, and so were the Misses Vere Aubrey, and she had promised, if possible, to get them orders; for these murder cases were so very interesting, especially when you knew something of the parties. And neither of the Misses Vere Aubrey had ever heard a trial for murder; so would dear Mrs. Lees be so kind?

Mrs. Herbert Lees replied that she would do her best to oblige dear Mrs. Mabury, but really the St. Olave's people had beset her so with applications for tickets, and her papa, too, had given away so many already, that she was afraid the magistrate's box would be sadly crowded, in fact, quite uncomfortable. But there was no one in the world she would sooner oblige than dear Mrs. Mabury, and she thought she might venture to promise three or perhaps four orders for next Friday. She intended to hear young Royland's trial herself, papa had given her an order some time ago, and if Mrs. Mabury would

call for her very early on Friday morning—not later than ten o'clock, as the court opened at eleven—they would all go together; it would be so pleasant to make up a nice little party, they should enjoy the day so much more. And then would Mrs. Mabury and the Misses Vere Aubrey and Mrs. Narrowby take a quiet cup of tea with her when they left the court? She would order a knife and fork tea to be ready at seven; the trial would certainly not be over before then, and she was sure Mrs. Mabury would be so fatigued, “those murder cases, you know, are so exciting, and no possibility either of quitting the court for refreshment.” Yes, they must all come home and take a quiet cup of tea with her after the case was decided.

Mrs. Mabury said it was very thoughtful of dear Mrs. Lees, and they would all of them join her in a quiet cup of tea after the affair was over. It was so kind of Mrs. Lees to think of such a thing. And really, as she said, those murder cases were very exciting, especially if the prisoner was brought in guilty, because it was such a very shocking thing to hear sentence pronounced upon a fellow-creature, such a very shocking thing.

But things of that kind would happen sometimes, and for her part she thought that capital punishment ought not to be abolished, though of course it was wretchedly depraved of the masses to take delight in witnessing an execution ; it was horrible, none but the very lowest could find any pleasure in seeing a man hanged. But she would call for dear Mrs. Lees at ten o'clock on Friday morning, in time to get places for the murder trial, and she should try and not forget her vinaigrette, the court was so close sometimes.

And then after a little innocent chat about one or two incipient weddings and as many imaginary engagements, the elegant advocate of capital punishment took leave of her friend and went on to the Deanery, where she had promised to dine and afterwards see Elene dressed for the county ball in the evening.

It was a gay ball, the gayest, so the papers said, that had been held in St. Olave's for many years. For a very superior regiment happened to be quartered in the barracks just then, a regiment which numbered amongst its officers several younger sons of the nobility. And then the bishop's lady had a few friends from London visiting her; and the

High Sheriff of the county, who had just been married, came to the ball with his bride, a dark-eyed Spanish-looking lady. And General Fortemery with his staff, who had come down the day before to review the regiment, came too, so that it really was a very brilliant affair, quite worthy of the lengthy notice which it got in the *St. Olave's Chronicle* next morning.

But every one said that no lady graced it more than the Dean's daughter. There might perhaps be prettier faces in the room. She was not so brilliant as the High Sheriff's dark-eyed bride, nor so sparkling as Emily Graham, Mrs. Mabury's youngest and most beautiful sister. But even those who preferred the brunette style of face were compelled to yield the palm of grace and dignity to Elene Somers—Elene in her white lace dress and lotos flower wreath, gliding serenely through quadrille after quadrille, or pacing the room arm in arm with Mr. Rivers, to whom she was to be married in a month. Oh, there was no one in the room so queenly, so tranquilly beautiful as the future mistress of Meadowthorpe Hall. So all the gentlemen said.

Gavin Rivers did not win such golden opinions

from the ladies as his bride-elect did from the gentlemen. He was so very quiet, indeed almost morose, neither grace nor elegance in his manners, and no conversation, absolutely no conversation at all. It was really quite a bore to go through a figure with him. They wondered how the Dean's daughter could fancy him. And so plain too. Why, in a twelvemonth his hair would be quite grey. And such a very peculiar expression in his face, such an odd smile, so bitter and satirical. How *could* Miss Somers fancy him?

Perhaps Miss Somers did not fancy him very much. Perhaps, though she would move through his home like a queen, she would not fill it with such store of love and sunshine as some one in Meadowthorpe could have lavished there. Perhaps by and by her perpetual serenity would satiate him, like the unchanging chords of some quiet sleepy tune. Very likely, most likely. But Elene Somers had been out eight or nine seasons. It began to be important that she should marry, whether she "fancied" the bridegroom or not. Besides, "Meadowthorpe Hall" was such a pretty address to engrave upon her visiting cards. The Rivers' motto, "True and firm," would look so well

upon her crested envelopes. Old Mrs. Rivers, who lived in that little crimson oratory of hers, reading the Experiences of the Saints, and never interfering with experiences of a more material nature, would make a model mother-in-law. And Mrs. Colonel Gore, with her handsome London house and *entrée* to the choicest society of Belgravia, was the very ideal of a sister. With advantages like these, to say nothing of high descent and considerable funded property, a little peculiarity on the part of the gentleman might easily be overlooked. There was much to fancy in his position, even though other things were not all that could be wished. On the whole, it was a desirable match, a very desirable match.

With such a future brightening before her, why should not Elene Somers be all smiles and tranquil beauty as she floated through the Hall of Guild on the night of the St. Olave's county ball, whilst Janita lay awake, counting the weary hours in her dim little room at the Aspens? And if Mr. Rivers did look rather moody, and if his fair partners left him one after another disgusted with his quietness and want of "conversation," and if there was a cloud upon his face and a somewhat repelling frown

on those overhanging brows of his, doubtless sensible people would set all these things down to anxiety on poor young Royland's account. For everyone knew that the new steward took a deep interest in that sad affair of the murder on the haling-bank road; and as the trial drew on it was only natural that he should feel depressed and troubled rather, especially as Mr. Narrowby, whose judgment could always be relied upon, gave it as his opinion that the young man would come to grief.

It was this, they said, nothing more than this, that made Mr. Rivers so gloomy on the night of the county ball at St. Olave's.

CHAPTER. IX.



FRIDAY morning came. Those of the county people and Close aristocracy who had been to the Mayor's great Assize banquet the night before, opened their eyes wearily enough as the grey November dawn stole through their damask curtained windows. Then that same November dawn crept into the cell where Roy was sleeping for the last time on his narrow straw pallet. Before night came he might be free. Or he might be in that other cell, whose occupants were so well cared for, where private interviews were allowed without intervention of magisterial notes, and where the services of the chaplain could be commanded at a moment's notice. As Mr. Narrowby said, prisoners in the condemned cell of St. Olave's gaol were treated with such uniform consideration.

The trial was to begin at eleven o'clock, but by daybreak a crowd had assembled round the gates, and long before the judges, with great flourishing of trumpets and marshalling of tin halberds, had set out from their lodgings in the High Street, the court was packed from end to end with an eager, expectant throng. Not the plebeian gallery only, where rough-looking people, trippers from Mills-many or the other manufacturing places, sucked mint lozenges and regaled themselves with beef sandwiches wrapped in soiled newspaper—not the plebeian gallery only was crowded, but the magistrate's box too, where, snugly ensconced behind crimson curtains and supported by the most comfortable of cushioned seats, those of the upper classes whose tastes led in that direction might familiarise themselves with the details of crime. Being of course provided with vinaigrettes and scent bottles, in case anything very unpleasant should be brought forward during the course of the trial.

For it is a noteworthy fact, that women of family and position, women who have been brought up in refined society, women who pride themselves upon the delicacy of their sensibilities, who would faint

at the sight of a cut finger and go into hysterics if the drowning of a litter of kittens were mentioned in their hearing—such women can sit for hours listening to the details of a cold-blooded murder. They will put aside their costly lace veils to catch a glimpse of the man who has hurried his brother man to an untimely death. They will peer through their jewelled eyeglasses at the murderous weapon, the knife, or pistol, or blood-stained club, which is brought into court as mute witness of the deed of wrong. And whilst crying down as brutal and altogether disgusting, the curiosity of the vulgar herd who throng round the scaffold to gloat upon the struggles of its victim, they think it quite compatible with feminine propriety to follow step by step the process which is to lead him thither, to mark the tremor on his features and the agonised working of his frame as link after link in the chain of evidence leads on to detection and to death.

Mrs. Eustace Mabury and her dear friend Mrs. Narrowby and the aristocratic Misses Vere Aubrey would scarcely for the life of them have gone within half a mile of St. Olave's gaol on the morning of poor young Royland's execution. It would have been so horrible to meet those crowds of peo-

ple pouring into the town to glut their vicious taste for excitement round the scaffold where a fellow-creature was about to expiate his crime by an ignominious death. But they did, each and all of them, very much enjoy sitting in the magistrate's box on that eventful trial day, and hearing the counsel for the prosecution and defence, and criticising the demeanour of the prisoner, who was described in the papers "as a young man of prepossessing appearance," and following the evidence, which seemed to lead so slowly and surely to conviction. Of course there was nothing at all disgusting in that sort of curiosity, nothing at all inconsistent with the womanly sweetness and gentleness upon which they so much prided themselves.

And that black cap too, ominous signal of doom and death, lying on the judge's bench, half hidden by his scarlet robes—would it be drawn over his grave face, whilst from beneath it he slowly pronounced the fatal words which condemned Bessie Ashton's lover to be hanged by the neck until he was a corpse?

If the truth could be told, Mrs. Narrowby rather hoped the judge *would* put it on. Not that she had the slightest personal feeling towards poor

Royland, oh, dear, no ! not the slightest. For anything she knew to the contrary, he had always been a very respectable young man until that unfortunate love affair upset him, and it would be a shocking thing, a very shocking thing indeed, especially for his aged father and mother, if the case went against him. But still Mrs. Narrowby never had heard sentence of death pronounced. In all the murder trials she had heard yet, the prisoner had either been acquitted or sentenced to a limited period of transportation, and she really should like, just for once in her life, to see how a man would behave when listening to his final doom, when hearing the very words which sounded his own death-knell.

“It must be so very impressive, must it not ?” she remarked to the rector’s lady who sat next her, scent bottle in hand ; “so exceedingly solemn, you know, to see the judge put the black cap on and tell a man that he is to be hung in three weeks. I could not say such a thing, I am sure I could not. Capital punishment is really a very fearful thing. Don’t you think it is, dear Mrs. Mabury ?”

Mrs. Mabury said that capital punishment was a very fearful thing, but necessary, quite necessary

for the proper maintenance of public peace. And when she had said that, she lifted her gloved fingers as a signal for silence. For the prisoner had just been brought into court, the jury had been sworn, and the trial was about to begin.

“Do you plead guilty or not guilty?” asked the judge.

“Not guilty, my lord,” answered a clear voice from the dock, the same clear voice which had so often sung in answer to the sixth commandment—
“Incline our hearts to keep this law.”

“Dear me!” said Miss Matilda Vere Aubrey, “how very hardened! It is really quite shocking to see anyone so hardened. A young man of such respectable family too, brought up within reach of the catechism and outward means of grace. And after Mr. Narrowby had said so decidedly that there cannot possibly be a doubt about the murder. But as our dear clergyman reminded us only last Sunday, guilt is such a hardening thing, there is nothing so hardening as guilt.”

And then Miss Vere Aubrey requested a lady, who was sitting in the front seat, to move slightly to one side. The lady's crimson plume hid the face of the prisoner, and Miss Vere Aubrey could not

enjoy the trial properly unless she had a full view of the prisoner's face. *Would* the lady kindly oblige her by moving just a very little?

The lady did move a very little, whereupon Miss Vere Aubrey, in the sweetest of Norman accents, thanked her, and then gave her whole attention to the trial, which was now in full course.

Roy looked very hardened, if the calm, erect bearing of a man who knows himself to be innocent, may be called hardness. He betrayed no sign of fear as the evidence darkened against him, as witness after witness accumulated facts which seemed so surely to fix his guilt. Indeed, as Mr. Narrowby said, the case was very serious. The counsel for the defence would need great store of eloquence to force away the grave, settled look which was slowly gathering on the faces of the jurymen, a look which said as plainly as any words could speak—

“Guilty.”

Even Gavin Rivers, who fully believed in Roy's innocence, began to feel uneasy as the chain of evidence grew more and more complete; as the statements of the Meadowthorpe witnesses proved beyond a doubt the long, deep-lying grudge be-

tween the prisoner and Peter Monk, and words were recalled in which Roy had threatened to avenge himself for those cunning acts by which Monk was seeking to lure Bessie Ashton away.

Mr. Narrowby, sitting in the front seat of the magistrate's box, rubbed his hands vigorously. Not that he, any more than his worthy wife, bore the slightest grudge towards the young man who stood there in the dock with folded arms and calm, pale face. No one would regret more than himself if the worst came. He had a sincere respect for Roy. The foreman of the timber-yard was a first-rate hand, steady for the most part and well-conducted, it would be a loss to the parish if anything happened to him. But still, when a man has made up his mind that things shall go in a given direction, there is, after all, a certain satisfaction in finding that they do go in that direction. The best of men, the kindest, the most charitable, likes to know that his judgment has been correct, likes to know that events will justify him in saying what every true-born Briton glories in saying—"I told you so. Did I not tell you so?"

"Dark case," said the little architect, briskly, turning round to Mrs. Mabury. "Very dark

case ; everything against him. Certain to be hung. Never heard clearer evidence in my life. Jury won't think it needful to go out of court. Take my word for it, they won't."

Then Mr. Narrowby took off his spectacles, rubbed them with his handkerchief, put them on again, and leaning his elbows on the front ledge of the magistrate's box, looked more keenly than ever at the prisoner. It would have been a satisfaction to detect a little tremor, just a very little, in that resolute countenance.

There was none, though. Once only, through all that long trial day, did Roy's composure fail him. He had borne up bravely whilst Bessie Ashton, with calm face and voice that never faltered from its first steadfast tones, answered the questions of the barrister and judge. Her look at him when she came into court, so full as it was of pure, unshaken trust, of confidence that, come what might, all would be well for both of them, seemed to give him new strength. But when his mother, feeble and trembling, was brought forward, her poor withered hands clasped tightly together to still their trembling, her dim eyes wandering over that throng of gaping faces, until at sight of her

boy, the pride and darling of her heart, standing there in the dock, so changed and worn since last she looked upon him, the tears rained down her face, and she broke into a pitiful wail ; then Roy's lip did quiver, and for a moment his proud head was bent.

But only for a moment. Almost before the ready reporters had time to pen the sentence, which appeared in the next day's papers—"Upon the appearance of his mother, who is a very aged woman, the prisoner was much affected"—Roy stood erect again, facing the judge with a glance clear and straightforward as ever.

The poor old woman gave her evidence feebly, hesitatingly, often looking towards her boy as if afraid she had said something that might be turned against him, or as if mutely asking for that stay and support which she had so long received from him, which now he was so powerless to give. And the counsel for the prosecution, a keen, witty fellow, out of whose heart had long ago faded any sweet memory of a mother's voice, any thought of a mother's love, seemed to take a pleasure in bewildering her with unexpected questions ; causing her to contradict herself from time to time, and then

reproving her with sharp bitter words, which made Roy long to spring at him and fell him to the ground.

At last the painful process was over. Half fainting with terror, Roy's mother cast one more piteous look at her son and was supported out of the court. They took her into a little room on the other side of the lobby, where her husband and Bessie Ashton were waiting. Mr. Rivers had obtained this privilege for them, a private room where they might stay quietly until the issue of the trial was known.

Hour after hour passed on, whilst they waited there. Gavin Rivers came to them often, cheering them when he could with hopes of a favourable verdict; or when he could no longer cheer, sustaining them with words of pity, sometimes mingling his tears with theirs. Worn out at last with grief and weariness—for they had walked the whole distance from Meadowthorpe that morning—old Ben Royland and his wife fell into a troubled sleep, she sitting by his side, her withered face, upon which the tears were not yet dry, resting on his shoulder, her hand clasped in his.

Poor souls! They had not loved each other too

well in the time that was passed. Ben's harsh temper, the old woman's fretful desponding ways, had soured their home-life very much. Many a hasty word had passed between them, many a cold, distrustful look had chilled into indifference the love that was once warm and true. But the touch of sorrow healed their petty quarrels. This great grief clasped their hands once more. Now, after bitterness and strife, they sat side by side again, coming to each other for rest and comfort ; leaning on each other for strength and peace, as in that old happy time when first the names of husband and wife were spoken between them.

Bessie crouched down on the floor, gazing into the fire, which had burned very low, scarce serving now to chase away the thickly gathering gloom of twilight. Her hands were folded on her lap, save when, from time to time, she clasped them and moved her lips as if in prayer, prayer that strengthened her and Roy to bear suspense, fast deepening into torture.

For, when the first strain of excitement had passed away, weariness came, and with it hope faded slowly out. Looking upon Roy's face a few hours ago, seeing it so calm and resolute, Bessie

felt as if all must be well, as if no harm could come to the innocent. She was strong then. She could endure and hope. Now, fasting and fatigue had done their work upon her. It seemed no longer impossible that Roy should die. Nay, as the time wore on, she felt as if the fear of death was slowly settling into certainty.

She could hear the passing and repassing of footsteps in the lobby outside when fresh witnesses were called into court and those who had given their evidence were dismissed. She could hear the whispered conversations of the barristers, who clustered in little groups, speculating on the probable result of the trial. She could hear the idle jesting of the judge's servants and the men in waiting about the court, who were glad of anything to wile away the long hours which hung so heavily upon their hands. By and by there was great trampling of feet and unlocking of doors. The jurymen were being marshalled into the room where they would have to stay until they had decided whether Roy should live or die. With weary sickening dread, Bessie heard the lock turned upon them. As the clerk came back again into court, she fancied she heard him say to one of the witnesses—

“Sure to be hung. Sure as he’s alive.’

Sure to be hanged. And that was the window of the condemned cell, just opposite. There was light enough for her to see its iron grating. That was the room, then, where Roy would sleep to-night, where he would sleep every night until that fateful morning came, when, with the chaplain and sheriff’s officer, he would be brought out and go along the narrow stone passage and through a little trap door which led to the scaffold, the scaffold with its black cap and hangman. Abigail had told her about it; Abigail had seen an execution once in front of St. Olave’s gaol, and she meant to see another too, before long, for it was an awful sight, she said, and made her say her prayers better at night.

All this was going to happen to Roy, her Roy. Roy, whose hand she had held under the old pollard willow tree; Roy, who had been so kind and good and patient, who had never spoken a bitter word to her, though she had wronged him so. Ay, and more than wronged him.

Had she not murdered him too? Was it not her doing that he stood there a prisoner, with death so near, death to which her folly had brought him?

Oh! to bring back that day, only that one little day! Oh! to have obeyed the voice which told her to go after him, and put her hand in his, and say she was sorry. Oh! never to have seen Peter Monk, never to have taken his gifts, never to have listened to his luring words, the words which had made her anger Roy so! But it was too late.

Roy had forgiven her. There was no anger between them now. Dying, he would know that she was true to him; that never, save in the foolishness of an idle thought, had her love failed. That might bring her peace ere long. His blood was upon her, though. But for her, he had not died so soon.

Bessie could not bear it any longer. She got up and began to pace the room very softly, lest she should disturb the husband and wife, between whom and their terrible grief, sleep still drew its kind curtain of forgetfulness.

And she was thus pacing up and down, one prayer, a prayer for Roy, one thought, the thought that she had killed him, striving together in her heart, when the door was opened, and some one came in.

Not the clerk, whose stolid face and hard busi-

ness-like tones had chilled her so often that day. Not the barristers, who had come in sometimes to take down a statement or seek fresh evidence. The room was fast darkening, but Bessie could tell even yet that the face over which the dim red firelight played, was not the face of Gavin Rivers, true friend and helper. His head was never thrown so proudly back, no light hair curled round his forehead, seeming to make sunshine amongst the gloom.

With one quick thrill, she knew not whether of joy or pain, she felt herself in Roy's arms, held fast to him, his heart beating against hers, his tears upon her cheeks. He was free—all her own now. No prison bars should hold him any more, no gaoler bid him back to the grated cell, no rude hands lead him away to the scaffold. They belonged to each other for life now, not death—sweet life, with all its gladness, all its hope.

Bessie never knew how long they stood there in the gloom and deepening twilight. For joy, like sorrow, does not count time by moments. She only knew this, that Roy had come back, that Roy would never leave her any more. Oh, blessed knowledge, filling and quieting her heart! Oh, blessed meeting, which flooded that dim prison room with more than

the light of summer noontime! Roy had come back!

Ben and his wife slept on. At last there was a low pitiful wail. Waking had come, bringing back sorrow keener for its lull.


“Oh, Roy! Oh, my poor Roy!”

“Yes, mother.”

And then the dim eyes, scarcely dry from grief, poured out their overflow in tears of joy, and the withered hands that had been stretched out in anguish were clasped in blessings on his head.

Come away, and leave them there, to the glad content, the bright up-springing thankfulness which comes to human hearts sometimes, like the clear shining after rain.

CHAPTER X.

O Mrs. Narrowby did not see the black cap put on after all. Which, as we have hinted before, was a slight disappointment. For she had attended so many murder trials, and all of them had come to nothing, or only issued in a sentence of transportation; and a sentence of transportation, even though it might be for the remaining term of a man's natural life, was not nearly so impressive as the putting on of the black cap. Well, she must wait until the next assizes; there was generally a case of murder tried at the St. Olave's assizes, for all the Millsmany criminals came to the city gaol, and Millsmany, in common with most manufacturing districts, was a terrible place for crime.

Miss Matilda Vere Aubrey, too, was rather vexed

about it, and said that if she had been on the jury she should have felt herself in duty bound to hold out against the verdict. The finding of that liquor-flask had done it all, she was sure, added to the testimony of the witness who had been sent for by Mr. Rivers from the establishment in London where Monk was employed after he left the Duke's yard. Young Royland might thank Mr. Rivers that his life had been spared. Many a man had been convicted, yes, and executed, too, on far less decisive evidence. If it had not been for the London shopman, who testified to Peter Monk's drinking habits since he went into their establishment, and for the accidental discovery of the flask, which appeared to corroborate that statement, Bessie Ashton's lover might have slept that very night in the condemned cell of St. Olave's gaol. And Miss Vere Aubrey was not quite sure whether, after all, it would not have been the proper place for him.

But the matter was settled now. The ex-prisoner might say his prayers and be thankful. But he must not say them in the parish choir any more. Mrs. Narrowby hoped Mr. Mabury would take measures to prevent him from doing that. To have a young man who had been tried for murder,

and whose innocence, so far as her own convictions went, was by no means certain, was an unprecedented thing, a most unprecedented thing. Mrs. Narrowby thought he ought to leave the village after what had taken place. She was quite sure that she could not worship comfortably in the Gablehouse pew whilst young Royland was sitting up near the organ and singing the responses, just as if nothing had happened. It would destroy her devotions completely. The prayer-book might say that when a wicked man turned away from his wickedness and did that which was lawful and right, he should save his soul alive; but the prayer-book did not say that he was to go on singing in the parish choir, and joining in the hymns like green-baize Christians, who had never so much as had a desire to break one of the commandments. And Mrs. Narrowby said she was quite sure Mrs. Mabury would support her when she gave it as her opinion that such a thing ought not to be allowed in the parish church of Meadowthorpe.

Yes, Mrs. Mabury said she would support Mrs. Narrowby, and she would speak to the rector about it that very night. Mr. Mabury always did what was suitable. He never allowed private

feelings to influence him in the discharge of his parochial duties, and though young Royland was a valuable addition to the choir, and could take the tenor parts as well as even the St. Olave's cathedral singers, still that was no reason why the worship of the rest of the congregation should be injured on his account. But, oh dear! how insufferably hot the court had been, and what wretched odours were wafted across from the plebeian end, where those Millsmany trippers were eating bread and cheese, and sucking mint lozenges. Mrs. Mabury really thought that if she had known beforehand what the issue of the trial would be, she could not have endured such close contact for such a lengthened period with the very scum of society. Only, of course, in a trial of that kind, you kept expecting that the judge might be called upon to put the cap on, and that, you know, must be so very impressive. And did Mrs. Narrowby notice the barristers? Such a very fine set of men, only their wigs spoiled them so. It was really astonishing the difference a wig made in a man's appearance. She scarcely knew her own cousin, poor Tom Travers, when he made his first appearance on the Northern circuit in his counsel-

lor's dress, such a guy he looked. She should never allow Eustace to bring up one of her boys to the bar, for nothing destroyed a man's reputation for handsomeness sooner than a barrister's gown and wig.

All this at Mrs. Herbert Lees' little knife and fork tea, where Mrs. Mabury, and her dear friend Mrs. Narrowby, and the Misses Vere Aubrey, were recruiting exhausted nature, and perhaps endeavouring to quiet their disappointment, by the Emperor's own mixture unadulterated, and the daintiest little ham sandwiches that ever reposed on damask, or nestled beneath curled parsley.

And then the conversation worked its way round to the grand wedding which was shortly to take place in St. Olave's; that very grand wedding, when the Bishop himself would officiate, and the Canon in residence give away the bride; when the Cathedral bells would ring out a merry peal, and the Close be all alive with scarlet-coated postilions in white favours. When Mrs. Colonel Gore, too, was to come down from London, with her handsome husband. Mrs. Colonel Gore, whose orange blossom was scarcely faded yet, whose bridal satin had not yet lost its whiteness. And Mrs. Colonel

Gore would bring down the London fashions, for everyone knew she moved in the best society there. Oh ! it would be a wedding of weddings, that one from St. Olave's Deanery on the twenty-eighth of December.

Whilst the ladies thus chatted over their fragrant tea and dainty little ham sandwiches, Gavin Rivers was walking up and down the Cathedral Close in the dark November twilight, his fingers still warm with the clasp which Roy had given them, old Ben Royland's thanks yet ringing in his ears, the mother's tears almost wet upon his hand. He had not come to Meadowthorpe all in vain, though for some things his life there had brought him little but sorrow and humiliation. One or two there were who would remember him gratefully when he was gone. He had made some hearts glad, though his own had won scant measure of the precious gift.

Lights were shining from the Deanery windows, but he did not go in there to receive Elene's congratulations on the successful issue of his efforts in Roy's behalf. When, scarce two hours ago, the foreman's verdict, "Not guilty," sent a thrill of excitement through the court, and bowed Roy's head in silent thankfulness, the first thought which

flashed across Gavin Rivers' mind had not been, "What will Elene say?" No, not though even then his pocket-book contained a tiny slip of paper on which was marked the size of a ring to be chosen by him when he went up to London next week, and though the Dean's daughter was at that very moment looking over some elegant lace squares, Honiton, Brussels, and Mechlin, which Mrs. Colonel Gore had selected in town and sent down for approbation.


Theirs might be a very suitable match. Of course as everyone said so, that must be the case. Still, there would not be much of the old-fashioned element of love in it, not much of that mutual affection which story-books love to describe, and without whose sunlight home is a pitiful delusion. However, we have nothing to do with that. Gavin Rivers and Elene Somers have chosen their own lot. No one forced their hands into a life-long clasp; if the clasp becomes wearisome, then, who is to blame? The Dean's daughter is amiable and beautiful. The new steward of Meadowthorpe is a man of honour, carrying as his motto the old device, "True and firm," a device which no man bearing the name of Rivers ever sullied yet. When beauty

and honour meet, is it not well said that the match is a suitable one?

So Elene looks over her lace veils, fixing at last upon a Honiton with sprays of rose-leaves. And Gavin walks up and down the dim Close, thinking what a fool he has been, what a failure life has proved. Which thoughts he will have to think again many and many a time, for being true thoughts they stay; he cannot cast them out.

And so ended Roy's trial day.

CHAPTER XI.

ESSIE'S troubles were not all over when Roy came and clasped her to his heart, there in that dark prison room, whilst old Ben and his wife slept away their grief, not knowing how joyful the waking would be.

Some people, like Mrs. Colonel Gore, manage to make an agreeable and even successful thing of a life which is throughout just a tissue of elegant falsehood. Others take one false step, let vanity or passion have the reins for a single hour, and the bitterness of it lasts for years. The fault may long ago have been pardoned, all stain of evil swept away from the soul, perhaps that purer life won which sorrow, even though it be the result of sin, may sooner or later work out for us all. But the sin produces its own result. All things have

their consequences, so have even forgiven faults.

Bessie was a noble woman now, far nobler than she ever could have been had not that idle folly of hers brought her into trouble, whose fiery heat purged away the dross from her nature, and left the pure gold behind. But if the sorrow worked its spiritual result in nobleness of soul, the folly worked its natural result in great bitterness and disappointment.

After all though, it is better to see the termination of our follies in this world, and then say farewell to them, knowing that they will be remembered against us no more for ever, than to meet them in the other life, follies and sins too, unrepented of, unatoned for; and to have to bear them company for ever there. For here, death lays the bitterest sorrow beneath five feet of green sward, but the other life has no grave for its woes.

Roy came back again to Meadowthorpe. Mr. Rivers reinstated him in his old position as foreman of the Duke's timber-yard. He had always been a favourite amongst his fellow-workmen, he was so brave and frank and straightforward. It was worth something to see their faces when the young man in his grey blouse and canvas cap came to the

Duke's yard again, and took his place in the timber shed. They gathered round him with smiles and hearty greetings, such as only British workmen can give, and such as they only give to those who have won them honestly. And they shook his hand until it fairly trembled in their rough grasp. Yes, trembled, for Roy was not quite so strong now as he used to be before that terrible day of his quarrel with Peter Monk. Two months' of prison life and prison discipline, to say nothing of bitter humiliation and painful suspense, had somewhat sharpened his features and dimmed the eagle-like keenness of his blue eyes, and weakened the sinews of those arms that used to be so strong for labour, so ready for defence.

In other things besides these you might note a difference. Not that his step was less stately, or his bearing less king-like. "He carries himself just like one of God Almighty's royal children, he does, bless him," said Larry Stead, who was one of the first to welcome him when he came out of prison.

There was something, though, which made you feel that a change had passed over Roy, brave, bold Roy, the pride of the village, the flower of

the Duke's workmen, the handsomest stripling in all the country round. What was it?

It is a glorious thing for a man to walk his native village face to face with those who have known him from his childhood, and to look into their eyes fearlessly, daring them to accuse him of aught that an honest man need blush to own. It is a glorious thing for a man to bear a name upon which no stain, true or false, ever rested; to clasp hands with the best and the noblest, feeling that their memory is not more pure than his. Hitherto Roy had done this. Now he could do it no more. He could no longer walk under the shade of the elm trees whose leaves had fallen upon him autumn by autumn ever since he was a boy, and give back glance for glance, steady and straightforward, to all he met. To noble natures, the mere suspicion of guilt is more galling than the guilt itself to meaner ones. Roy felt that a blot rested on the name he had worn so proudly, a blot that could never be wiped away until the day when all thoughts are known. The people looked coldly at him as he went amongst them. Friends who had once given a kind look and a pleasant greeting, passed him silently by, without smile or recognition. Or, if they did

pause for a chance word, it was given with a Pharisæic kindness which seemed to say, "You have disgraced yourself, but we will not cast you off."

It was this that changed Roy, that wore by degrees the bright genial smile from his face, making him silent and reserved where once he had been open as the day. His honour was gone, and you had better take life from a true man than that.

Bessie noticed the change, but she did not like to say anything about it. Since Roy's trouble had passed away, her old shyness had returned, and though she shed many a quiet tear, she said not a word. He had suffered much for her—she must be content to suffer a little for him.

Roy never spoke to her now about the cottage, nor about settling in it. It was deserted, locked up; the little pieces of furniture which he had made with so much care, heaped together in one room just as he had left them the day before the Hall wedding, three months ago. Bessie could have borne that silence, though, for she was in no hurry even yet to be married, if only Roy would have talked to her in the old kind way about other things, as he used to do before that terrible afternoon when she wounded him so by her conduct with Peter

Monk. But this he did not do. Often she caught his eyes fixed upon her, sadly, tenderly, telling that love had not gone, but when he met her glance, he turned his own away. There was something unuttered between them, and it took all Bessie's love to bear with this long silence.

Three months ago she would not have borne it, but since then she had learned to suffer and be patient. She was content to wait. Once he had asked for words to assure him of her love; now she could best prove that love by silence.

At last he told her all.

It was one cold December night, as she came out of church, that Roy waited for her, and, putting her arm in his, led her down Meadowthorpe lane. Such little snatches of time were all they had now, now when they might have been married and living so happily in the new cottage by the Mill-slip, always together, never parted at all. But she dare not think about that.

"Bessie," said Roy, when they had got nearly to the end of the lane, "I've had something on my mind to tell you this long time past, but I couldn't get it said. The words seemed to stick fast when I wanted to tell 'em to you."

And then there was a long pause. Bessie could not see Roy's face, for the night was dark, neither moon nor stars were out. She could only feel that he was trembling.

"Bessie, I can't stop in Meadowthorpe. Meadowthorpe'll never be a home for me no more. And that was what I wanted to tell you."

"Well, Roy," and Bessie did feel just a little bit vexed. If that was all, he might have told her before. "Well, Roy, there's many a place in England as good as Meadowthorpe."

"It isn't any place in England that'll be a home to me now, Bessie. A thing that's done here get's known right away through the length and breadth of the land. You can't rub it out if you try ever so. I can't bear to go down the streets and hear the people say I'm the man as was tried for murder. And there's many a one won't believe but what I did it, too. I can tell that by the way they look at me, let alone little ill turns I keep getting. Mr. Mabury sent me word a bit since as I shouldn't be wanted to sing no more in the choir after to-day; and Mr. Narrowby said only the day afore yesterday, in the Duke's yard, that a village was a bad place for a man to lose his character in; things didn't get

forgot in a village as they did in big places like London and them there. He didn't say it to me, Bessie, but he meant me to hear it, I know he did, else why should he have said it in the timber-shed where I was working with all the men round about? If I'd done ought wrong, and then sneaked through it without proper punishment, maybe it would be my duty to stop here and live it down as well as I could and get my character back; but I never lifted my finger against Peter Monk, and I'd have pulled him out of the dyke, I would, if I'd known he'd been in it, and it vexes me for folks to put the stain of murder on my name and me not able to help myself, or make 'em believe it isn't true."

Roy was silent for awhile, treading the ground fiercely and with such rapid strides that Bessie could scarcely keep up with him. Then he began again.

"No, Bessie, I must be right away. I must go across the sea somewhere, where nobody knows me and I can start afresh with a clear course. I've been talking to Mr. Rivers about it, and he says he'll help me all he can. He knows of a place away down in South America, where he lived when

he was a little boy, and he says I can get along well there; for them as understands timber and that sort o' thing can always find a berth and make their own way. And he says there's a gentleman there manages some property of the Duke's, and I could get engaged to him and make a man of myself again."

"America? That's a long way off, isn't it, Roy?"

"It is, Bessie, honey, thousands of miles away. But it's a fine country. Mr. Rivers has lent me some books about it, and has telled me how a man with a decent head-piece may fend for himself there if he isn't afraid of work; and I never was afraid of that in my life. There's a ship sailing the beginning of the year, I could go by. And when I get there I must fight my way best I can, while I see how things is likely to turn out, and whether I can make a comfortable home for you, and then I'll come back and fetch you. Dare you go, Bessie?"

Bessie felt as if an electric shock had passed through her. She trembled in every limb. Her arm fell away from Roy's. He made no attempt to take it again. There was only a deeper touch of sadness in his voice as he said—

“Maybe I haven’t the right to ask it of you, Bessie. There’s many a man in Meadowthorpe lordship would be proud to have you for his wife, a man that’s never been in prison, nor had an evil touch upon his name same as me. And you wouldn’t have to wait for him as you might have to wait for me, months and perhaps years before I could make a home for you where you’d be as well off as you are here in the old country. And he’d wed you straight away, though I wouldn’t say as he’d love you better than I’ve done, ay, and I always shall love you, Bessie, whether I win you for my own or not.”

Roy could not say much more. There was a choking feeling in his throat. His face was turned towards her, but in that dark December night, Bessie did not see how the proud lips were quivering, and the keen blue eyes shining through unshed tears. He thought of the happy life that might have been ; then of the life, full of toil and danger which he was asking her to share with him. He could only falter out, not daring even to take her hand any more—

“Bessie, will you go?”

Bessie had to hold herself firmly up, straining

every muscle, or she would have fallen to the ground. Roy going away, going to leave her for long, long months, going to that strange country across the wide ocean, there to toil and to struggle, where no word of hers could reach to comfort him, no look of hers give him strength any more. No cottage for them at Meadowthorpe now, no sweet home peace by their English fireside. Oh! she could not leave the old country. She could not say farewell for ever to St. Olave's, whose grey cathedral towers shadowed her mother's grave and her sister's home. She could not bear to stand under the willow tree where she and Roy first held each other's hands, and feel that before its silvery leaves came out again, he would be gone far away. She tried to speak the words which might have made him stay. She tried to put out her hand to his and say—"Roy, don't go away." But she could not. Something held her back.

Again and again she tried to say it. Again and again the words died upon her lips. Then she remembered that day, three months ago, when she had stood by him in his prison cell. The shadow of death had not parted them then, the wide sea should not part them now.

"Roy," she said, and this time there was steadfast calm in her voice. "Roy, I told you once that I didn't care where I went, so only you went with me. And I'll say it now, just the same."

With that she put her hand back again into the old resting-place. He held it tightly, that clasp telling all, for he spoke never a word. And they both felt, that holding each other's hands in that way, and surely trusting in each other's truth, and sharing a lovestrong through trial, and holy through suffering, neither life nor death could part them; they belonged to each other always.

And so they turned back again, down Meadowthorpe lane, under the elm trees, through whose leafless boughs the wind crept with low moaning sound. And the night was dark, very dark. But as they came out into the village, one single star had pierced through the gloom, and was shining over the far west, Roy's new home.

CHAPTER XII.



THAT was in December. Soon after Christmas, there was a very elegant wedding in St. Olave's cathedral, the most elegant wedding, so everyone said, that had been solemnised there since Miss Graham, the late High Sheriff's daughter, committed her hand and fortune into the care of the Rev. Eustace Mabury, M.A.

The morning was bright for the time of year, though it was but cold winter sunshine which streamed down through that glorious old east window upon the heads of Gavin Rivers and Elene Somers as they knelt together at the altar, and promised to take each other for better or worse, until death did them part. Very solemn words, solemn under any circumstances, but especially solemn when the long, long future which they involve has

nothing but winter sunshine to warm it. And it is to be feared that the Deanery wedding, over which the bells rang so merrily, and at which the champagne flowed so freely, would have no other than winter sunshine.

The bride neither wept nor trembled. She was just as tranquil and serene as a mould of blanc-mange. The bridesmaids said she behaved beautifully. But then Elene Somers was always so sweetly calm and self-possessed. She always conducted herself with propriety in whatever circumstances she might be placed. So of course her demeanour on the wedding morning was only what might have been expected. The bridegroom was grave. As Noelline had said to her sister-elect some months before, marriage is a serious thing, a very serious thing, and Mr. Rivers evidently felt it so. Perhaps, as he looked through her costly lace veil at the serene features of his bride, there might rise for a moment before him the quick smile and bright changeful face of Janita Raeburn, Janita who ought to be quite forgotten now—Janita, who could never be anything but an acquaintance, scarcely even that, considering how she had behaved to him. But on the whole it was a very

successful wedding. The ring was given, the benediction said. The procession moved slowly down the choir whilst the organ pealed forth the sonorous chords of Mendelssohn's Wedding March. Afterwards there was great driving to and fro of newly varnished carriages in the Close, great shedding of tears as the bridesmaids clustered round to say good-bye, great ringing of bells as Mr. Rivers led his new wife to her travelling-carriage. Then the happy couple set off to Paris, whence in due time a letter came from young Mrs. Rivers to say how very much they were enjoying themselves. The picture-galleries were charming, and the opera so delightful, and Gavin had bought her such a superb fur-lined velvet cloak, it really was a love of a cloak, and she thought that she would be very happy, for Gavin did not seem to consider expense at all, and everything he got for her was the best that could be procured. She concluded by saying that they expected to be home about the middle of January, and she hoped her mamma would tell Brooke to be particularly careful how she packed the wedding dress; that kind of satin spoiled so soon unless it was very carefully packed.

The affair was very much talked about at Meadow-

thorpe. Mrs. Mabury, who was one of the wedding guests, recounted all the particulars to her dear friend Mrs. Narrowby, who retailed them to the Misses Vere Aubrey, from whom they were divulged by degrees to the whole of Gentility Square, and finally found their way to the Aspens.

But Janita had work to do now, work for heart and hands, which kept her from wearying over any of these things.

Since the beginning of Autumn, Professor Ruthven's health had been failing rapidly. Miss Hepzibah, however, would not believe anything of the sort. It was just the change of the season, nothing more than the change of the season. When people began to get into years, a little damp weather affected them very much. Jabez would be all right again when spring came round.

"Blessings on us!" the brisk spinster would say, when Janita suggested that perhaps change of air would be beneficial, "why, the healthiest people in the world feel a bit shaky now and then. If I were to make a noise about it every time I catch cold or feel a pain in my back, the house would never be still. Nonsense, Jane, child, it's the weather, that's what it is. We must have him some new

flannels made. I'll see about them next time I go down to St. Olave's. There's nothing like flannel when people get into years."

Dr. Maguire's opinion was the same, though expressed differently. The autumn at Meadowthorpe was such a very trying time, especially for aged people, and this year it had been particularly relaxing. Professor Ruthven would certainly find his strength return with the bracing air of February and March.

To which poor old Uncle Jabez replied feebly, that he hoped it might be so.

Dr. Maguire was a very clever practitioner. He had had great experience. If he said the Professor would be better when spring came round, of course the Professor would be better when spring came round. There was no need for any further anxiety then about that matter. Miss Hepzibah, also, was a woman of discernment. She had seen a great deal of sickness and death in her time. She knew well enough when people were going to be ill. Their appetites always failed, that was the first sign. Then their tempers got twisty, there was no such thing as pleasing them, or getting on the smooth side of them. After that, they began to

have aches and pains all over. When the aches and pains came, it was time to send for a doctor, and get the patient's feet into hot water, and put him under a regular system of management. That was Miss Hepzibah's theory.

But the Professor had shown none of these preliminary symptoms. His appetite did not fail. He ate his meals as regularly as ever, and seemed to enjoy them as much. At least, he never said anything to the contrary, so his sister took it for granted that he enjoyed them. And his temper was not more twisty than usual. Indeed, she had never known him to be so easily satisfied, so careless about his own affairs, as he had been for the last few weeks. Neither did he say anything about aches and pains. She did not believe he had any to say anything about. The Ruthvens, especially the men, had always been remarkable for their good constitutions. Brother Jabez going to be ill? Nonsense, he was going to be nothing of the sort!

And then Miss Hepzibah went on counting her preserve-jars, and considering how much mince-meat she should make this Christmas.

Janita, however, seemed to find out by intuition, what others failed to discover by long experience.

She noticed how the old man's interest flagged even in his favourite pursuits. It was rarely now that a fresh supply of paper was required on his study table. The pens and pencils which she laid ready for him were left untouched for days together, so were the mathematical instruments, the rule and compass, by whose help he had drawn out so many diagrams; and at very lengthy intervals was the inkstand replenished, which used to be emptied so rapidly and so regularly. But still he sat in his great study-chair as usual, turning over the manuscript of his work on Motive Forces; vainly striving to grope his way through problems and propositions which the poor tired brain could no longer comprehend.

"Jane," he would say, as his niece came in with the customary morning portion of whiskey-toddy, mixed as she alone could mix it—"Jane, this proposition is not clear to me. I think the print must be defective."—Then the Professor would rub his spectacles—"Type is not so well cast now as it used to be when I was a young man."

Janita took the book and read the proposition to him with the intelligent straightforwardness of one who understands what she reads.

"There, uncle, you see it now, don't you?"

"Well—no. I—I think you cannot have gone through it quite correctly. To find the effect of the force A B.—From B draw perpendicular to A. Or is it to be drawn to—to B D?—give me the book, Jane, I will try again."

And then the dim eyes strained painfully over the page, until Janita persuaded him to give it up, and take a turn in the garden.

"You are tired uncle, you have been studying too long. Shut it up now, and I will bring you your greatcoat. It will be all right to-morrow."

"Yes, all right to-morrow. We will try again to-morrow. I think I will go out on the Links now, with the Professors. Good morning, gentlemen. We shall meet as usual to-morrow."

Then he would totter up and down the garden for half an hour, his long grey hair fluttering in the wind, Janita holding his arm, whilst he, fancying she was one of the Professors, talked to her about his lectures, and the progress of the students.

Poor old Uncle Jabez!

At the beginning of December he took to his bedroom. It tired him to get upstairs at night. Would his sister excuse him and send him his

breakfast for a morning or two, just a morning or two? After that, it was always sent up. Then dinner, then tea. The Professor never came down any more. Still Miss Hepzibah protested that nothing at all was the matter. It was better for him to stop in his own room during the winter, it kept him nicely out of the way; and besides, those passages were so cold, they were enough to give anyone the rheumatism. He would be all right again when spring came round. She was quite sure he would be all right again when spring came round.

It was simply ridiculous to talk of his being ill. Dr. Maguire prescribed no medicine, only to keep him warm and give him plenty of nourishing diet, that was all. Miss Hepzibah did not believe in such invalidism as that. She could understand a proper, practical illness, where the patient had pains all over him, and wanted medicine administering fifty times a day, besides fomentations and embrocations and decoctions for this, that, or the other ache or pain. No one could manage an illness of that kind better than Miss Hepzibah. But to see her brother lying in bed day after day with such a good appetite, and a regular pulse, and no pain at

all—why, to tell the truth, it rather put her out of patience. He only wanted rousing—she was quite sure he wanted nothing but rousing. And she would try if she could not rouse him.

“Now, brother Jabez, you feel a great deal better to-day, don’t you?” she would say as she brought him his breakfast. “I am sure you feel a great deal better, don’t you? And wouldn’t you like to have some warm water and get up? And couldn’t you get into the dining-room for an hour or two, whilst Bessie comes in and sweeps this room out? It looks as if it hadn’t been brushed for a century. Now, brother Jabez, you must try and get up and let Bessie sweep it out.”

To which the old man shook his head feebly.

“Oh! nonsense; don’t tell me. I’m sure you’re better. Now just see how well you’ve slept, and taken your breakfast so nicely too. I’ll send Bessie up with the water, and we’ll have the room made comfortable. And what would you like for your lunch?”

“Anything, Zibie, anything will do.”

“No, no. Don’t tell me anything will do. Just say something—oysters, or a mutton chop, or a little bit of stewed rabbit. Only say what, and

you shall have it. What *is* there now that you want?"

"I don't want anything, Zibie, only to be quiet."

And the dim old eyes would close again, and the withered face be turned to the wall.

"Blessings on us!" said Miss Hepzibah, as she tramped downstairs. "That's a funny way of having an illness. I can't understand it at all. Why, when our father was ill, it was one person's work to wait on him and cook for him and give him his medicine and his drops and his pills and his decoctions. I like that sort of illness best. It's practical. But dear me, Jabez will be as sound as a drum when spring comes round again. Seventy-five's no age at all."

So little by little the guardianship of the Professor's comfort fell into Janita's keeping. Not that Miss Hepzibah lacked proper affection for her brother. Nothing of the sort. She would have spent her life in cooking things for him, if only he would have said what he wanted. But she could not bear to be "dawdling" about and doing nothing, not even measuring out drops or shaking up bottles of medicine. And besides, Jabez was not ill. She was quite sure he was not ill. It was

nothing but the weather. The weather was so relaxing. Dr. Maguire said so, and Dr. Maguire had great experience.

Janita spent her time chiefly now in the Professor's room. His mind wandered very much. Sometimes he used to fancy himself back again at St. Andrew's amongst the students. And all his old keenness and vigour seemed to have returned to him as he reasoned out some abstruse problem, or demonstrated to them a new proposition. Janita was very much startled the first time she heard him talk in this way. She thought he must be going to have a stroke or something of that sort. But Aunt Hepzibah soon set her at rest.

"Blessings on us, Jane, child, you needn't be afraid. That's just like brother Jabez. He was always such a one for getting into a bewilderment, and fancying he was somewhere else. I remember once, a great many years ago, we went to a wedding breakfast, the only one we ever went to, brother Jabez and I, and he was appointed to answer the speech to the health of the bridesmaids. Well, of course we expected it would be something about hoping that they would all get married before the twelvemonth was out, that is

the proper thing you know to say for the bridesmaids at a wedding breakfast. But if he didn't get up and begin—'Gentlemen, I have to remark that light is a very peculiar property.' Dear me, how we did laugh! But my brother was a great deal younger then than he is now, and people had not quite given over thinking that he might get married himself, though I always said he never would. So you needn't be surprised, Jane, child, if he rambles sometimes. That kind of thing runs in the family, at least, the men. His father was just the same before him."

So it passed over. But one day towards the end of the year, when the short December light had nearly faded out of the room, Professor Ruthven woke from a long sleep, and looking intently into Janita's face as she bent over him, said in a low, strangely softened voice—

"Jeanie."

Janita thought it was a pet name he had found for her, a smoothing down of that harsh rough word which never seemed to hold any music until Gavin Rivers spoke it.

"Well, uncle."

"We might have been very happy, Jeanie."

"Is it anything I can do for you, uncle?"

"Very happy, Jeanie. But they told me you were going to be married. I don't know. It is such a long time ago. I—I should have tried to make you happy. Yes. The wind is strong. We must not go on the Links to-day. The other walk, Jeanie."

And then his thoughts wandered aimlessly away to the class-room and the students, and he began to repeat scraps of lectures, only sometimes naming that one name, "Jeanie."

The tears came into Janita's eyes. He had not always been quite alone, this reserved, self-contained old man. There was once a time when the branch, so withered and sapless now, sent out tender green leaves, when the poor desolate heart bloomed with young flowers of hope. But there had been neither dew nor rain to freshen them, and no sun to warm them into beauty. Poor old Uncle Jabez! So he, too, had had his little romance, over which, long ago, the hard, dry reality of life had crusted. He, too, the grave, silent, mechanical Professor, had hoped and loved, and been disappointed, just as people love and hope, and are disappointed now. Once he thought to have

sat by his own fireside, and to have had little children playing round his knees, and a wife's eyes looking into his, and a wife's voice making music in his home. Poor Uncle Jabez ! what a different thing life might have been for him ! Ah, well ! it was to be hoped that another world would give him the key of the heart, locked up and deserted here ; that somehow, somewhere else, he would wake and find the light.

Janita had never loved her uncle very much ; but she was glad, now, that she had been kind to him, that she had done the most any woman could do to brighten his lonely life. No memory of unkindness vexed her now, no thought of duty unfulfilled, of loving deeds held back from want of will, or done with careless hands. It seemed as if a new tie bound her to the old man, as if that glimpse into the long-past warmth and tenderness of his heart had drawn her more closely to him.

Not many days after that, Jabez astonished his sister very much by dying.

He was quite as well as usual in the afternoon, and Miss Hepzibah had gone across to the working party at Mrs. Narrowby's, the working party at which the Deanery wedding was to be discussed.

Janita sat in her uncle's room by his bedside.

If there were sad thoughts in her heart, that was the time to think them, for the evening shadows had begun to creep up, and only the sound of the old man's feeble moaning disturbed the utter stillness of the room. By and by he stretched out his hand; she laid her own in it, his long lean fingers, cold with the chill of age, closing tightly over hers, warm with young life.

"Jeanie."


Once more the old days had come back, the days when love and hope were not quite strange. Janita bent over him. There was a dim, flickering light in his eyes.

"It is a long way, Jeanie, a very long way. And I am tired. It is time to be going quietly home."

Then he said no more. His eyes closed. He breathed softly as a little child. Janita sat there holding his hand in hers, expecting that he would wake soon. But he never woke any more. The chill in those stiffening fingers was no longer the chill of age.

A blaze of firelight, suddenly springing up, cast its light over the thin face. Janita had never looked on death before, but something told her that she was in its presence now. All was over. Poor old Professor Ruthven had gone quietly home at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

LESSINGS on us! Who would have thought that brother Jabez meant such a thing as dying?" said Miss Hepzibah, when, in answer to a summons from Bessie Ashton, she hurried away from Gablehouse, and bustled into that quiet room at the Aspens, where the Professor lay as if asleep, only a little paler and colder than usual. "Who would ever have thought of such a thing? And taking his meals so regularly, a mutton chop in the middle of the day, and something tasty for his dinner, besides as much broth and calve's-foot jelly as you could give him. So different from our father when he was taken with his last illness. Dear me! I could almost think it was a mistake."

And Miss Hepzibah grasped the chill fingers, and laid her hands on the great bald forehead, as

if to certify herself that Professor Ruthven was, indeed, as people say, "no more."

"Well," she continued, with something like a sigh, "I am sure I shall miss him very much. A man in a house is always something to look after and take care of; and though we weren't exactly brought up together, for Jabez was never at home except in the holidays, from being quite a boy, I always said I loved him as if he had been my own brother. Yes, I don't think if he had been my own brother I could have loved him more."

That was true enough. Miss Hepzibah loved the old Professor as much as she had ever loved any one in all her life. She was sincerely devoted to him in her active, matter-of-fact, practical sort of way. For many years that devotion had manifested itself chiefly in cooking dinners for him, and mending his linen, and superintending his general exterior comfort. Now he needed other services, to the performance of which she proceeded with business-like dispatch. Miss Hepzibah might say it of herself every Sunday morning at church, if she chose, but she never gave other people reason to say it of her, that she left undone those things which she ought to have done.

Accordingly, she sent Abigail to fetch old nurse Cloudie, and to tell the sexton to toll the church bell. Then she summoned the undertaker to arrange with him about the funeral. A plain funeral it was to be, but everything very good, for she wished to show the utmost respect to her brother's memory. Mr. Graves might choose what pattern he liked for the cards, only there were to be no weeping angels upon them. Miss Hepzibah did not approve of weeping angels; and she thought fifty would be sufficient, as the Professor's circle of acquaintance was small. The coffin was to be of the best, toughest oak, covered with black cloth, bearing the inscription, "Jabez Ruthven, aged seventy-five," on a black plate. And Mr. Graves was to have it nicely padded and lined, that the corpse might lie comfortably. She hoped Mr. Graves would be particular about that, to have it nicely lined. Then Miss Hepzibah went to the linen chest in the great attic, and chose a pair of the best sheets, for her brother to be laid out in. After that, she wrote to Zachary Ruthven, the Professor's own and only brother, a very infirm old bachelor, residing in Aberdeen, informing him of the death which had taken place in the family, and

adding, that, as she felt quite equal to all needful arrangements, there was no need for him to risk a journey to St. Olave's, which, at his time of life, and liable as he was to rheumatic affections, would be both useless and dangerous.

Not until these practical matters, which occupied her until quite bed-time, were completed, did Miss Hepzibah go up into her own room and lock the door, and allow herself to shed a few faithful tears over the memory of the brother for whom she had cooked, sewed, and mended for the last thirty years. Next morning her eyes looked rather red. The winds at that time of the year were very keen, she said, and most likely she had got cold with running up and down stairs so much the day before. When that explanation was given, she went about her duties as usual. Miss Hepzibah was not demonstrative.

Professor Ruthven died on the new steward's wedding day. As Janita sat by her uncle's bedside that afternoon, she could hear, for everything around was very still, the faint, far-off chiming of the marriage bells from St. Olave's cathedral. Nothing was done at Meadowthorpe. There was no outward festivity of any kind, not even a holiday for the Duke's men. Mr. Rivers particularly

wished that no display should be made. Strange, very strange, Gentility Square said, and not exactly respectful to the bride. But then Mr. Rivers was a peculiar man—every one knew that, and perhaps when he gave those directions, he might be thinking of the sad affair which followed so closely upon the rejoicings of last September. Still, the church bells might have been rung. That, surely, could not have done any harm.

Next morning two bridal envelopes came, addressed to the Professor and Miss Ruthven. Miss Alwyne was at the Aspens when they arrived; she had come across to stay for an hour or two with Janita. They were sitting in the gloomy old dining-room, which seemed gloomier now than ever, for the closed blinds kept away even the scant beams of sunlight which tried to creep through the aspen branches outside. Miss Hepzibah was up in the great attic, looking over the black dresses which she had when she went into mourning for her aunt ten years ago.

Janita opened her uncle's envelope. There were the bridal cards.

“Mr. and Mrs. Gavin Rivers. At home, January 14th. Meadowthorpe Hall.”

It was well, it was very well. That was all done with now. Pain had fulfilled its work in making her strong. She would not forget it, but it need not vex her any more.

"They are pretty cards, are they not?" she said, as she laid them on Miss Alwyne's lap. "But then, the Dean's daughter is considered to have very perfect taste in all such things as these."

"Yes. I think the wedding must have been arranged suddenly though, I never heard of it until two or three weeks ago."

"Did you not? I knew long before then. Noeline Rivers, I mean Mrs. Colonel Gore, told me only a few days after it was settled. Of course it is a very suitable match. Mrs. Gore said so. She said disparity was such a ridiculous thing, and, you know, Miss Somers is only a few years younger than Mr. Rivers. I hope they will be very happy."

And in that one little sentence—"I hope they will be very happy," Miss Alwyne learned the whole truth. For it was spoken in that sharp, self-controlled way, which people unconsciously use when talking of anything which has given them great pain. And when the girl had said it, she turned to a quite different subject, still, how-

ever, keeping the cards in her hand, looking at them often and earnestly.

Miss Alwyne understood all now—why Janita had been so unwilling to get that note for Bessie from Mr. Rivers—why she had avoided speaking of the Hall family lately, when, before, she used to delight in telling her friend of the pleasant times she had spent there—why she had changed so quickly from the bright, buoyant girl, to the steady, almost dignified woman—why it no longer seemed natural to call her “little Janita,” but rather to treat her with the respect which those win who have lived long and made much of life. Yes, all was clear now.

But Miss Alwyne said nothing. Neither word nor look betrayed the secret she had guessed. And when she kissed the girl more tenderly than usual at parting, Janita thought it was because of that shadow of death which was even then resting upon them.

The Professor's funeral was a very quiet one, not marked by violent outbursts of grief, or the shedding of many tears. After it was over, there settled down upon the little household that peaceful sadness which is the most fitting tribute to an old

man's memory. Loud grief is for those whom death snatches from us in the glory and beauty of youth, life's promise unfulfilled, life's sweetness all untasted ; not for those who, having wearied out their three-score years and ten, lie down to rest until the morning.

Miss Hepzibah hushed her scolding for a season. Her loud "Jane, child, Jane," did not echo through the house so frequently or so noisily as before. Sometimes she would even sit still for half an hour with shut eyes and idle hands, a thing she had not been known to do for years. Or, as she was tying down her preserves and examining the jellies—which disappeared so slowly now that poor brother Jabez had gone where he wanted them no more—she would rub her eyes and say to Abigail,

"Blessings on us ! shall I never get rid of that cold in my head? I never kept a cold in my head so long before."

That was what she said when Abigail was in the store room; but, if no one was there, she would let the tears slip leisurely down her spare cheeks, and drop one by one upon her black bombazine gown. For she had been very fond of brother Jabez.

In Janita there was no change. Her face, paler now, and more thoughtful than formerly, her quiet voice, and ways as quiet, seemed to match the outward garb of mourning that she wore. People said that Miss Raeburn felt her uncle's death very much. And no wonder, for she had been most dutiful to him. People said, too, that the wedding would have to be put off—she could not very well marry until at least six months after the funeral.

And what of Bessie Ashton?—poor Bessie, who went about her work so quietly now, never singing or getting into pettish tempers, or stealing odd glances at the looking-glass when Miss Hepzibah's back was turned, or running to that hammered glass window whenever a low clear whistle was heard at the end of the street? Ah! poor Bessie! she *was* very much changed. For Roy had gone away. Even now the good ship *Isidore* was tossing on the stormy waters of the Atlantic. Bessie shivered as the bleak January wind came sweeping over Meadowthorpe marshes, or shrieking round the gables of the old house; and she learned at last to respond from her very heart to that prayer in the Litany, which before had been to her but as an idle sound—

"For all who travel by land or by water, we beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord."

It was very uncertain when Roy would come home. Mr. Rivers had procured him employment, not upon the Duke's South American property, but under a gentleman in Rio, who was engaged in the timber trade. It was possible his work might take him far up the country for long periods. Certainly he would not return before a twelve-month had elapsed from the time of his landing. The gentleman to whom he had engaged himself, a friend of Mr. Rivers, who had come over to England in search of a clever workman, refused to take him out at all for a shorter period than twelve months. And at the expiration of that time, he was only to come home for a few months, with the understanding that he should return and resume his engagement in Rio.

A year and a half, then, perhaps nearly two years, before she could see him again. And they might have been so happy. Even now, instead of shivering at the sound of the bleak wind, she might have been sitting with Roy by their own fireside, his proud and happy wife. When Bessie thought of this, how she wept over the

foolish vanity which had cost them both so dear!

“Proud and happy!” Yes, she might have been proud and happy, but not so worthy, not so faithful as now. For Bessie had never loved Roy half so much as since that great trouble came which knit them more closely together. And, hard though it was to part, bitter though the tears were which she shed, as week after week added another thousand to the miles which stretched between them, still she would not, even if she could, bring back the past. For the sure trust which she had in Roy now, trust won through sorrow, brought her more peace than the girlish liking which was all she gave him before. Besides, he would come again some time, she knew he would, and then they would never part any more, never any more at all.

So Bessie Ashton worked on patiently in that station of life in which it had pleased God to place her, praying for Roy, sweetening all her labour by the thought that one day she should see him again. And when, waking in the night-time, she heard the rough wind, and thought of the good ship *Isidore* battling with the waves thousands and thousands of miles away, she would comfort herself with a verse which Janita sang so often,

“The storm is changed into a calm
At his command and will,
So that the waves which raged before,
Now quiet are and still.”

Hope on, Bessie ; though it is not all hope that
comes true at the last.

CHAPTER XIV.



EVERYONE expected that the Professor would leave the bulk of his property to Janita Raeburn. Everybody was mistaken. Most likely that work on Motive Forces so absorbed his waking thoughts that he quite forgot to replace by a new one the old will, in which, after setting aside a hundred a year for Miss Hepzibah during her lifetime, he bequeathed the remainder of his earnings and savings to the establishment of a mathematical scholarship in the university of St. Andrew's. It must have been forgetfulness, nothing else. For the Professor was a good man, honest and upright in his way ; a man who would not willingly do an unkind action to anyone, least of all to the daughter of poor Maggie Ruthven. And it certainly was an unkind action to transplant

Janita from a home where she was comfortably provided for, to one which, considering his own advanced age, could not last for long. No doubt he intended to leave his niece something; as much, at any rate, as would keep her from absolute want. And if Miss Hepzibah had had the slightest idea that brother Jabez meant such a thing as dying there and then, instead of coming round again in the spring, she would have given him no rest until that will had been altered, until a comfortable slice had been taken from the St. Andrew's scholarship and placed in the funds on Janita's behalf.

But everyone knows so exactly what ought to have been done when it is too late to do it. The Professor was dead, and his niece was left without a sixpence. That was just the state of the case. And Gentility Square pitied her accordingly. She would have to get her own living, the Square said, and then added that it was a very wholesome thing for young people to work.

In which maxim Gentility Square was perfectly correct. Work *is* a very wholesome thing, setting aside entirely its needfulness. The Misses Narrowby would have bettered themselves by working

more—though, of course, Gentility Square was not thinking about itself when it advocated the utility of labour—so would the Misses Vere Aubrey, Mrs. Macturk, and the generality of the upper class fellow-Christians. Perhaps, after all, the Professor's forgetfulness might be a blessing in disguise. Perhaps Janita Raeburn might become a happier woman, at any rate more noble, more useful, more worthy, because of this "deplorable neglect," as the Square people called it, which forced her out of the ranks of genteel idleness into those, so scantily filled, of true and reverent workers.

Miss Hepzibah determined to leave Meadowthorpe. She had only stayed in it so long because her brother liked the place. But now that the ties of duty and affection, as the estimable lady called them, bound her no longer, she determined to take up her carriages and go into Lancashire, where her own mother's friends, wealthy cotton manufacturers, lived.

So there was a sale at the Aspens. The dingy old brocatelle hangings, the faded carpets and quaint furniture, the general household effects, kitchen and bedroom furniture, everything, in

short, except the family pictures, the Professor's papers and the personal possessions of Miss Hepzibah and his niece, came under the hammer. The house was advertised to be let. A family from the south came to look at it. A very desirable family, consisting of a widow lady with a son, now going through his college course, and a daughter of seventeen, just from school. After a little delay they took the place on a lease of seven years.

Miss Hepzibah looked after the sale herself. She would willingly have stood at the auctioneer's desk, and knocked down the goods to their respective buyers. She was quite sure she was equal to anything of that sort. But propriety did not allow it, and Miss Hepzibah was obliged to submit to propriety. However, she did what she could. She superintended the packing up of the lots, she polished the silver and brushed the curtains and rubbed the furniture until it shone again, in order that these articles might fetch a higher price at the sale. She rooted out the old rubbish that had been accumulating for half a century in attics and lumber rooms, stocked all the old women in the parish with odd cups and saucers, superannuated kettles, sauce-

pans and other articles of domestic use, which were too far gone to make their appearance in the public catalogue of effects, and sent away nearly a cart-load of worn linen to the St. Olave's hospital, where it ought to have gone years and years ago ; only Miss Hepzibah had such an affection for her linen bundles, she did so love to open the chest in the great attic and meditate on those linen bundles. At last everything was disposed of, except Janita. And what was to be done with Janita ?

The Professor's sister was magnanimous. She offered the girl a home with her in Lancashire, where, in return for a trifling sum, which she could easily earn by teaching music or something of that kind, Janita might be managed and attended to and kept in a wholesome state of restraint to the end of her days. The child was no relation to her, Miss Hepzibah said, but she should like to do her duty. Nobody should say the Professor's sister failed in doing what was proper to her brother's relations. And now that she was getting into years—at least, not exactly getting into years, thank goodness she had never known better health in her life than at the present, and could stand a spell of pickling and preserving, or anything of

that kind, as well as any woman of thirty—not getting into years then, but, but—not quite so young as she used to be, it might be a comfort to have her niece with her. And if the girl behaved well and did her duty, there was no telling what she might gain by it. Miss Hepzibah had three or four hundred a year of her own, unencumbered property.

Dr. Home, too, as soon as he heard of the Professor's death, pressed Janita to go and live with them in London. And with his letter there came one from poor Agnes, the life-long invalid. She would like so to have Nyta back again. It would be such a comfort to her to have some one she could talk to and confide in. Would not dear Nyta come?

Janita was free to choose now. Three alternatives presented themselves to her. She was dependent for a living on Miss Hepzibah's charity, Dr. Home's kindness, or her own exertions. She chose the last. Hitherto she had worked for daily comfort. Now she must work for daily bread. Where, and how? Those were the next questions. Difficult questions for any woman to decide. Very difficult for an Englishwoman of good position

and cultivated mind and independent spirit.

She thought long and seriously about it. At last she decided to go and live with her old friends in London, and follow as a profession that work of writing which hitherto she had only taken up as an amusement. She had already achieved some success. Her name was not quite unknown. With toil and effort and struggle, she could make her own place in the world. She might not win great fame or great popularity, but she could at least win an honest, independent livelihood, that livelihood for which she must now trust to herself alone.

"I think this is the right thing for me to do," she said to Miss Alwyne, as they sat together for the last time in that dear little room where they had spent so many happy hours, where she and Longden Narrowby met for the first time only a year ago.

Longden Narrowby had not come in very often since the contents of the Professor's will had been made public. They were so very busy in the office now. Those alterations in the Meadowthorpe estate positively crushed the Duke's architect with work and anxiety. Selina had not had any sea weeds to arrange lately. Longden had not seen

any new books of poetry. Julia and Maria had been so busy in their districts, they had scarcely had a moment to spare, really they had been obliged to neglect their friends shamefully. They were *so* sorry.

That was what they used to say when they met in the street with handshakings and pleasant smiles and inquiries after dear Miss Ruthven, and all that sort of thing. But the walls of the Gablehouse library—that snug little room where the estimable family of the Duke's architect spent their private hours—the walls of the Gablehouse library, had they been endowed with the gift of speech, could have told a very different story. For Mrs. Narrowby said, as she sat in the Gablehouse library, how providential it was that Longden had not entangled himself beyond recovery at the Aspens. She was so glad she had counselled prudence, so thankful that her dear boy had had discretion enough to avail himself of that counsel. It would have been such a sad thing for a young man just commencing life on his own account to be burdened with a wife who could not help him to settle, who had not even what would keep herself, or pay for her own draper's bills. She was very sorry

for the poor girl. It was a sad thing for her. She had no doubt they would have suited each other very well, but it would never do for Longden to sacrifice himself in that way. It behoved every one to consider his own interests.

Mrs. Narrowby hoped, however, that her son would be judicious in withdrawing from his intimacy at the Aspens. Not to do it abruptly, as that would involve him in unpleasant remark; but with caution, gradually relaxing his attentions, whilst treating the family with becoming politeness. It was a delicate affair, and tact would be required. Tact in a matter of that kind was everything. He must call occasionally, at gradually increasing intervals. So must the girls, always however treating Miss Raeburn with the utmost courtesy. For she was very much to be pitied, poor girl!

Thus Mrs. Narrowby, when the contents of the Professor's will were made known in Meadowthorpe village. Of course after that, if a gentle hint was dropped by a visitor at Gablehouse relative to young Longden's attentions to Miss Raeburn, the architect's lady checked it at once. Nothing of the sort, positively nothing of the sort. It was pure

gossip, gossip was always so busy in small villages.

"A pleasant friendship. I assure you it was never anything more than a pleasant friendship. Longden used to go to the Aspens a great deal in the Professor's time, but when the poor old man dropped off, of course the intimacy ceased. You know my son would not think of exposing the young lady to remark by visiting so frequently at the house when there was obviously no attraction except herself. Longden enjoyed the Professor's company very much. He was really a very cultivated man."

But to return to Janita and Miss Alwyne, talking together for the last time in that pleasant little bay-windowed room at the cottage.

"I think it is the right thing for me," said Janita; "I shall feel that I am doing something in the world, that I am not wasting my life. And if God has given us neither homes nor home duties, we *must* work."

Miss Alwyne had proved that long ago. She had worked hard, and with work the rest and comfort had come. And they would come to Janita, too, in time. For though it is a perilous thing, and one which God surely never meant any woman to do,

to force her way alone, unaided through the great world where thousands are already toiling painfully enough for standing room, still it is what many a woman has to do, and many a woman does it too, retaining all that is essentially feminine in her nature, while yet she does for herself what God intended others to do for her. There is scarcely a nobler thing in the world than that a woman, when need comes, should be able to accomplish this.

Miss Alwyne, looking into that young face, upturned to hers, that face into which, instead of its former girlish brightness, there had come so much steady purpose and endurance, felt that Janita could and would accomplish this. And she told her so.

“But it will be hard work, Janita. You may win for yourself name and fame, position and independence, but times will come when you would give all these away for rest, just to feel that you are not forced to stand alone.”

“I know that; I have often thought about it all. But I am not afraid. I do not need name and fame, what I need is work. I must have work. And I believe this is the work which God has for me to do. If so, He will help me to do it. He will

not let me fail. And as for happiness——”

“It will come, my child. There is no happiness—no peace, which is indeed the highest form of happiness—like the simple doing of duty. It may not always make you glad, but it will always make you strong. God shelter you, Janita, and help you to live beautifully, never losing faith in Him; fearing nothing but wrong.”

So Janita went back again to the Aspens. Sitting in her own little room that night, she took up one of Miss Alwyne's books, and found in it these sentences—strange sentences rather to be found in a novel:—

“When night, needful night, gathers over the garden of our souls, when the leaves close up and the flowers no longer hold any sunlight within their folded petals, there shall never be wanting, even in the thickest darkness, drops of heavenly dew, dew which falls only when the sun has gone. So when at last the morning comes, our leaves shall be brighter and our flowers fresher and fairer for that divine dark, which, even as the sunlight, is God's gift, God's precious gift.”

There was no time to go to Miss Alwyne's any more after that. A few more days of toil and

worry and tumult, a final cannonade of exhortations from Miss Hepzibah, two or three farewell calls, one quiet walk at sunset over the marsh fields by the dyke-side, and for Janita Raeburn the old Meadowthorpe life, with its sad and beautiful memories, the joy it had given, and the joy it had taken, was a thing of the past. Youth lay behind her; before her the great untried experiment of life, that experiment in which so many fail entirely; which at the best is so full of disappointment, of care and anxiety and toil.

CHAPTER XV.



MISS RAE BURN had taken up her residence in town with the family in which she lived before the Professor adopted her. A fine opening for the young girl, one for which she ought to be very thankful. For it was such an uncomfortable thing for a woman to have to get her own living after years of ease and dependence. And of course there was nothing to which Miss Raeburn could turn but governessing, if she had been forced out into the world. And governessing was such a wretched thing, everyone knew what a wretched thing governessing was. It was exceedingly kind of those Scotch people to offer the girl a home.

So said Mrs. Narrowby to the Misses Vere Aubrey, about a week after Miss Hepzibah and Janita had left the Aspens. And then the conversation drifted

away to the new Mrs. Rivers, who was just beginning to make her return calls.

That was a gay winter in Meadowthorpe, very gay indeed. Gentility Square and St. Olave's Close had never shaken hands so frequently, or been in such a delightful state of friendliness. There were dinner engagements and supper engagements, little evening gatherings, "just to meet a few friends in a quiet way," quadrille parties, charade parties, balls and assemblies, in fact a repetition of what had taken place nine months ago, when Mr. Rivers first entered upon the stewardship. Only this time it was even more brilliant, for every lady thought she must outdo her neighbours in welcoming the St. Olave's bride; and so the entertainments gradually increased in magnificence—from Mrs. Mabury's small but very stately dinner-party, to the grand banquet at Mrs. Macturk's, to which her ball on the occasion of Miss Rivers' first appearance last April was not worthy to be named.

And the bride comported herself with such dignity. Those Close people always did. There was a cathedralesque majesty about them, which no one who had not been brought up under the shadow of Minster towers could ever hope to attain. She

was so very self-possessed, too, no foolish frivolity or girlish nonsense about her, and no ridiculous display of affection for her husband. Indeed her demeanour was so beautifully unconscious, that no one would have had the slightest suspicion, except from her bridal dress and the orange buds in her hair, that she and Mr. Rivers had been so recently married. That was just as it should be, Miss Vere Aubrey said. It showed such perfect good taste. Nothing annoyed Miss Vere Aubrey so much as to see a bride and groom completely taken up with each other; that sort of thing was so essentially vulgar, it stamped people at once as being destitute of pedigree; you never saw people of good descent conduct themselves in that way. Mr. Rivers had shown admirable discretion in his choice of a wife. He must be very proud of her, for she was such a charming woman. Not charming in the sense that the late Miss Rivers was charming. The new steward's bride possessed little of the airy sylph-like elegance which distinguished Mrs. Colonel Gore; but in her own way, which was a serene, tranquil way, Mrs. Gavin Rivers was charming.

So Gentility Square affirmed when the new wife

had floated her family diamonds and white robes through ten or a dozen of its entertainments. But when she began to return these entertainments, when at dinner after dinner, and ball after ball, the fine old rooms of Meadowthorpe Hall were lit up, and Rivers' plate flashed beneath the chandeliers, and black oak furniture reflected from its polished surface the glitter of crystal and porcelain, then the enthusiasm of Gentility Square reached its meridian. Mrs. Rivers was such a fascinating hostess. She smiled and sung and danced and chatted and made herself so agreeable, and the grace with which she presided at a dinner-table was perfect.

Nothing like it had ever been seen before in Meadowthorpe, such ease and elegance, everything managed so admirably, the servants gliding about like phantoms, doing everything in the right time and in the right place; the courses appearing and disappearing as if by magic, the appointments so complete, the whole affair as stately and harmonious and well-conducted as a full choral service in St. Olave's Cathedral; almost as artistic too. Certainly Mr. Rivers ought to be proud of his wife for the manner in which she presided at a dinner-

table. And if it was really correct, as Mrs. Mabury said, that Mrs. Colonel Gore had brought about the engagement, then he owed his sister a debt of gratitude which could never be paid.

At last the burst of gaiety, amidst which the Dean's daughter entered upon her married life, died away. Then came the dull chill February days, days when the Meadowthorpe ladies could not venture upon the muddy road which lay between the village and the Hall, and the Close people found it a bore to drive through seven miles of damp and fog for the sake of a morning call. And as the February daylight—which in that cloudy district was very scant indeed—wore away, there followed long quiet evenings, upon whose privacy no stranger intruded, from which the great world of society, with its balls and parties and entertainments, was quite shut out. Such evenings as, when years are passed away, some people remember with delight. Evenings sweet and memorable for those who have their home in each other's hearts, who find their joy in each other's love.

Not altogether sweet, by and by, for Mr. and Mrs. Gavin Rivers.

Because, as Noelline had said to her young friend at the Aspens, that afternoon six months ago, when she paid her farewell visit—

“You know, Janita darling, my brother has not sought brilliant gifts in his wife. Elene Somers is not what people call a very intellectual person.”

Noelline was quite correct in that statement. The new mistress of Meadowthorpe Hall was not by any means what people call an intellectual person, nothing of the sort. She was simply amiable and unimpressible. She had her gifts, certainly, gifts which were very good in their way. No one, not even the Colonel's lady, could surpass her in walking gracefully through a quadrille. She could dress herself in perfect taste. She could wear a shawl with unapproachable elegance. She excelled in state dinner parties. She had an agreeable flow of conversation; that is, she could say the same things half-a-dozen times over to as many separate morning callers, and not feel in the least wearied by the repetition.

All these gifts Mrs. Gavin Rivers possessed; and if home happiness could have been won by them, then the Hall family would have been very happy indeed, no family in Meadowthorpe more so.

But a bride cannot always be conducting state dinner parties, or walking through quadrilles. The putting on of a shawl, though it be put on ever so gracefully, loses by and by the delightful charm of novelty. People keep wanting something fresh, always something fresh. So did Gavin. He wanted his wife to converse. Elene had no "conversation," except such as was suitable for morning calls. Then he wanted her to read to him. No, nothing wearied Elene so much as reading aloud, he really must excuse her. Should he read to her? Elene was much obliged to him, but somehow she always went to sleep when she was read to. What should they do, then? Ah! that was the question.

Elene was too tranquil. That bland smile on her rosy lips never gave place to one of fervour, or enthusiasm, or sympathy. Those lips never opened to utter any but the merest commonplaces. The large blue eyes, always serene and placid alike, began to weary Gavin Rivers soon by the very quietness which, when he had been stung with disappointment, soothed him so. She never crossed him, never contradicted him, never offered him anything to battle against or conquer. If he was vexed and irritated, she was sweetly amiable; if he

was silent, depressed, she was sweetly amiable too; if he was dull and would have given almost anything to be stirred up by something bright or nonsensical, Mrs. Rivers was still sweetly amiable. Never anything else but that.

And so it was, that when the first few weeks had passed away, when the pale winter sunshine, which was all they had to begin the world with, had worn itself out, when Gavin Rivers had learned by heart every line and curve of the beautifully dressed lay figure which sat opposite to him with its white eyelids dropped and its jewelled hands folded in its lap, and when Elene had exhausted those limited conversational resources, which at the best were neither brilliant nor remarkably varied, home life at Meadowthorpe Hall began to be a dreary, meaningless sort of thing. Slowly enough the long afternoons and evenings passed away. Time seemed as if it needed a London policeman to keep saying to it, "Move on, move on." Mrs. Rivers went to sleep in her softly cushioned easy chair, waking up now and then to ask, in such sweetly amiable tones,

"Gavin, my dear, what o'clock is it?"

And when "Gavin my dear" had told her, she would politely repress a yawn and say—

"Dear me ! I had hoped it was much later than that. But I believe all the clocks at the Hall are in the habit of losing time."

Gavin thought so too. But it was only a recent habit. Then, when his wife had dropped off to sleep again, he would seek solace behind the columns of the "Times," that refuge for destitute sociability ; or, shutting himself up in his private business room, which was fast becoming *home* to him, he would spend hours in looking over plans and devising improvements in the Dykelands estate.

Poor Gavin ! For to an impetuous, energetic, and rather irritable man, perpetual amiability is wearisome. If the domestic atmosphere can be cleared in no other way, even thunder-storms are useful now and then. Perhaps a woman had better get up a little breeze of temper sometimes, just by way of a change, than be for ever saying, "As you please, my dear—you know I always do as you wish." The sweetest sentences may be heard too often, and then all their sweetness vanishes. Perhaps if Elene Rivers had roused herself to an occasional fit of what is called "contrariness," perhaps if she had given her husband an opportunity of exercising the passive virtues occasionally, in-

stead of keeping them all to herself, she would have been wiser, and he would have been happier.

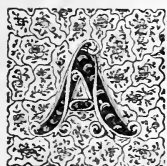
But, though the real pleasantness of life was thus wearing away, the outward surface of it was beautiful as ever. Young Mrs. Rivers had not married for love, and therefore to her the absence of it caused no aching void. She had an elegant home, plenty of servants, money as much as she could spend. As she said in that bridal letter from Paris, everything Gavin gave her was the best that could be procured; he did not consider expense in the least. Besides, she was the first lady in the village, the leader of fashion, the apex of the Meadowthorpe social pyramid. And the people who went to her elegant little dinners and evening parties all said what a charming woman Mrs. Rivers was, and how fortunate her husband ought to consider himself in having his position sustained and his home presided over by such a wife.

Their domestic life soon became that of many an upper class English family. All the little duties of politeness were scrupulously observed. They never spoke a rude or uncourteous word to each other. Elene was too much of a lady, and her husband too much of a gentleman, for anything so

ill bred as that. Neither did Gavin ever behave to his wife in such a way as to make society turn away its head and say, "Poor Mrs. Rivers!" And in that sweetly gentle "Gavin, my dear," of hers, there was none of the disdainful indifference, the careless, unaffected contempt which some women compress into the commonest phrases of social life. He was also remarkably attentive to her at church—the green-baize people did not fail to notice that—always found the places in the prayer-book, gave her the best seat in the pew, held the door open for her if the beadle did not happen to be in waiting, and in all outward observances conducted himself as a man should who has found in his wife the greatest treasure earth can give. A model husband, Miss Vere Aubrey said. That lady, since Professor Ruthven's death, had moved into the Aspens pew, as being freer from draughts.

That was just how things were at Meadowthorpe Hall three months after the Deanery wedding.

CHAPTER XVI.



ABOUT the middle of May, when the churchyard sycamores had shaken out their young green leaves, and violets and primroses strewed all the lanes round Meadowthorpe, Mrs. Rivers, senior, exchanged the society of saints in books for, it is to be hoped, the society of saints in heaven. At all events, she died, and was buried with great pomp and ceremony in a new vault which the steward purchased expressly for her, at the south end of the church.

Mrs. Gore came down from London with her husband to the funeral, which was a very grand one, quite as impressive in its way as the Hall wedding had been. Never before had the rustic population of Meadowthorpe had their feelings excited by a hearse with such lofty plumes, or been

called upon to witness such a procession of mourning coaches, black robed mutes, and velvet trapped steeds. They really could not say whether, for a real grand sight, the Hall funeral or the Hall wedding was the most to be admired.

The Colonel's lady looked very sweet in her deep mourning. Every one knows how charmingly pale golden ringlets combine with a crape veil. And Mrs. Gavin, Mrs. Rivers as she would have to be called now, looked very sweet, too; not so deeply affected as the Colonel's lady, of course, that would not have been suitable, though it was well known that she had been very much attached to her mother-in-law, but still moved to gentle tears, which made those large blue eyes of hers look more beautiful than ever. Young Mrs. Rivers must be a great comfort to her husband, the people thought. And really he wanted some one to comfort him now, for he did not seem nearly so well, or in such good spirits as when he came to the Hall a year ago. Mrs. Macturk, who was always ready to look on the dark side of things, hoped his accounts were all right; she did not like to hear of people in a position of trust looking anxious and out of spirits, it showed that something was amiss behind the scenes.

But the Duke's architect and Dr. Maguire, and others of more advanced Christian liberality, said it was the change of air. Meadowthorpe was a terribly damp place for any one who had been accustomed to a mild, warm climate. It was the fogs that affected him, together with natural grief for his loss. Still, there was no question that he was considerably changed, changed for the worse as regarded health and spirits, and therefore he was all the more dependent on those little attentions which none but a wife can give. Such a wife as young Mrs. Rivers.

The death of Gavin's mother made but little difference in his household. After the funeral he and Noelline looked over her papers. They were chiefly meditations and reveries, the diseased employments of a mind which fed upon itself until the food failed, and then starved to death. The only glimpse of real life which the search revealed was a journal, kept by Mrs. Rivers during her voyage home. It contained a few incidents of Mrs. Raeburn's death and the babyhood of little Janita, nothing more. Noelline took possession of it, and wisely judging that its perusal would do her brother no good, put it out of sight until a conve-

nient opportunity afforded for burning it. Then she and her husband returned to London.

Mrs. Rivers was soon forgotten, save by her son. Gavin could yet recall the time, though far away now, when he sat upon his mother's knee, and felt her kisses on his cheek. And for the sake of that time, he kept her memory green.

Spring wore on, and early summer came. Home life at Meadowthorpe Hall, keeping its outward beauty untarnished, lost daily more and more of its sweetness. No one knew anything about this, perhaps no one felt it very much, except Gavin himself. But he made no complaints. He began to seek what little happiness the world had for him, elsewhere than at home. That grand old oak-panelled dining-room, with its Turkey carpet and embroidered curtains, its family portraits and ancestral pieces of plate, was no sanctuary to him now. That being the case, excuses for leaving it were easily found. Business engagements were pressing. These continued alterations on the estate required increased attention. It was needful for him to spend much time in the Duke's yard, or in riding over the lordship, or in journeying to London for interviews with his Grace of Dykeland.

And when the new steward told his wife, in a quite careless, matter-of-fact way, that he should be from home for a few days, or that she need not expect him home to dine, or that he was going over to St. Olave's on business, and possibly should remain all night, she would reply, with unvarying sweetness,

“Just as you please, my dear.”

And then drop the large white eyelids again over the fancy-work or the fashionable novel. Never anything more than that. Oh! it was a wearisome thing, life at the Hall now.

But one evening he did stay at home, one sweet summer evening in June, when the sun was setting over Meadowthorpe Marshes, just as it set a year ago whilst he and Janita Raeburn watched it. Perhaps as he sat there in the oriel window of the great drawing-room, pretending to read the “Times,” he might be thinking of Janita; wondering what she was doing, when that wedding would take place, and if, when it did take place, she would come back and live at Meadowthorpe again, as Mrs. Longden Narrowby. Mrs. Longden Narrowby, and Elene Somers was Mrs. Gavin Rivers. Oh, what a game of cross-questions and crooked answers is played every day in the great world of

life. However, he had no one to blame but himself. Things had happened unfortunately. If Elene Somers had not come to stay at the Hall just when she did; or, if Noelline had not desired him to pay so much attention to her; or, if—going back to the very beginning—they had never met at Mrs. Mabury's elegant little dinner party; for, of course, it was not Noelline's fault that the explanation about Janita came out just on the eve of Elene's visit—if they had never met at all, then.

Wrong thoughts, very wrong thoughts, for the new steward to be thinking behind the shelter of the "Times." The sooner he sweeps them out of his mind the better. And Elene, who is lying on the sofa, idly turning over the pages of the London Magazine for June, will help him to do it.

"Gavin, my dear."

Her voice was just as sweet, just as musical, as when, six months ago, it murmured through folds of Honiton lace, the bridal "I will." Mrs. Rivers always addressed her husband in that way. Her perpetual "Gavin, my dear," worried him sometimes past endurance. If she would but vary the phrase a little, or only transpose it, and say, "My dear Gavin." But Mrs. Rivers never did either.

It would be "Gavin, my dear," to the end of the chapter.

"Yes, Elene. What is it?"

And Mr. Rivers did not even move his eyes from that column of the "Times" in which somebody's new book, no consequence whose, had won favourable mention from one of the leading critics. Not that he was reading it; we have guessed before that his thoughts were travelling in quite a different direction.

"Have you seen this chapter of Ina's on the English Lowlands?"

"I have. I always read those chapters of Ina's, they are the best in the Magazine. She writes with such spirit. I wish you would read them too."

"Gavin, my dear, you know I cannot read anything of that sort. Her style is too brilliant for me. I prefer something soothing. But I have got a little piece of news in connection with this chapter which will interest you."

"Indeed!"

That Mrs. Rivers should have anything interesting to tell him was a remarkable occurrence. Gavin lowered the "Times," so as to command a view of his wife.

Though the prospect was more extensive now than at Christmas, it was not quite so beautiful. A person unaccustomed to good society would have said that the steward's lady was growing fat. Already her fair, expressionless face was supported by a double chin; before long a third would, in all probability, be added. And her rings had been enlarged once or twice. By the time Mrs. Rivers had reached middle age, she would be majestic, not to say corpulent.

"I have been told this morning that Ina is your old friend, Janita Raeburn, that little girl you knew, with dark eyes and such a restless face. She lived with her uncle at the Aspens before Mrs. Seton came there."

"Yes, I remember where Miss Raeburn used to live," said Mr. Rivers, hastily, so hastily that his wife lifted her blue eyes to him with mild surprise.

"Ah, you used to go there a great deal at one time, Noelline told me. She was rather a fascinating little creature in her way, but perfectly unaccustomed to good society. I daresay you remember her coming to tea one night some time before I was married; well, I believe it is just about a year ago. You know you took me to see

that lovely view of the church. Oh, dear, what an uncertain thing she was, no repose about her at all. She looked rather pretty though that evening, in her pink dress and tartan ribbons."

But the "Times" was lifted again, and Mr. Rivers was thinking his own thoughts within its shelter as before. Not very pleasant thoughts either, if they had anything to do with the expression which gradually deepened on his face.

"Gavin, my dear."

"Yes."

"Don't you think it is very improper for a woman to write?"

"Certainly not, if she has anything to say."

"Would you like me to write?"

"I should be quite glad if you could. Be assured I would not prevent you, if your tastes led in that direction."

"Well, I think it is very improper."

"You think wrong, then. If you have done with that magazine, perhaps you will be kind enough to give it to me."

"Oh, yes, my dear. Will you come and fetch it? I can only say I am thankful that Providence did not make me an authoress."

If, as Gavin Rivers went across the room to fetch the paper, he had said the first words that came to his lips, Elene would have been told that the world might be very thankful too. But though Gavin knew quite well that his wife lacked penetration enough to be wounded by such a speech, he knew also that its rudeness, felt or unfelt, was the same. And the master of Meadowthorpe Hall had never yet said an ungentlemanly thing to anybody. So he held his peace.

"Yes, I am very thankful. Writing is not at all a proper employment for women—so masculine. But they say Miss Raeburn is quite popular in London now; mixes in really superior society, far above what her position entitles her to."

"Whatever Miss Raeburn's position may be, she has that in herself which would grace any society."

"Gavin, my dear, how ridiculous! just as if being clever got people into good society. You know very well that nothing but an introduction ever does that. Miss Alwyne has given her introductions. Being with a clergyman, too, makes her a sort of position. Somebody told me there was a young Mr. Home. I suppose she will be marrying him."

"I thought she was already engaged," said Mr. Rivers carelessly.

"To young Narrowby? Yes, so did a great many people. But there was nothing in it, nothing at all. Mrs. Narrowby told me herself, only a few weeks ago, that it was never anything but a pleasant friendship."

"I believe she told Noelline that it was something else."

"No, she did not. I asked Mrs. Gore myself, when I was staying here last September. You know the thing was talked about then. Oh, Gavin, my dear, I wish you would sit still; that habit you have got into of walking up and down, is so very destructive to the carpets, it is indeed."

For Mr. Rivers had laid down his newspaper, and was promenading the room from end to end, according to old established usage.

"The dining-room carpet is almost ruined already. But I was telling you about that engagement. Well, Mrs. Gore said then, Mrs. Narrowby told her that she should be happy to receive Miss Raeburn as a daughter-in-law. That was all. And now Mrs. Narrowby says there never was any such thing as an engagement between them; and that he

only went for the sake of the Professor's society. So wrong, was it not ? Especially as she had no brother to shield her from remark. And the Professor, you know, such an out-of-the-way——”

But the sentence never got any farther. For when Mrs. Rivers raised her eyes again, the room was empty. Gavin had gone out into the garden, where, had it not been for the high hedge, his wife might have seen him continuing his promenading exercise with increased rapidity in the laurel walk. She did hear his footsteps, though ; and felt thankful that her Turkey carpet was not bearing their weight.

We will leave him there to his thoughts, such as they were. Not thoughts exactly of love and charity towards all. Thoughts that were better walked down in that vehement, angry fashion, than suffered to blossom out into words and deeds. When he came into the drawing-room again, Mrs. Rivers was fast asleep on the sofa. She always had a very long sleep after dinner.

CHAPTER XVII.



ANITA'S new home was in Wim-
pole Street. It was a large, quiet,
old-fashioned house, formerly oc-
cupied by a family of rank. A
house that seemed to oppress you as soon as you
entered it, with thoughts of generations that had
been born and died there; of disappointments,
griefs, and anxieties which had been suffered by long
ago dead people, in those very rooms where now
such a sober uneventful life was lived. Once it
was considered a very handsome house. Even
now there was an air of decayed grandeur about it.
There was a great lion-headed knocker on the front
door, with an extinguisher beside it for the link
boy's torch. Entering, you came into a wide en-
trance-hall, from which a stained glass door opened
into a very dingy piece of garden; something like

that which stretched before the dining-room window of the Aspens. From one end of this hall, an oaken staircase, finely carved and polished, led to the suite of rooms which had been set apart for Miss Raeburn's use.

There was a hearty welcome waiting for Janita when she arrived, weary with her long journey from St. Olave's. Willie was not there. He did not live at home now, but miles away on the other side of London; near the residence of the Scottish clergyman to whom he was helper. Good Doctor Home was little changed from the time when Janita had romped in his study at Inverallan Manse, and climbed upon his knees and amused herself by pulling out stray white hairs from the flaxen locks which curled over his head. He seemed fresh and buoyant and cheery as ever, one of those men who never grow old. With Mrs. Home, time had not dealt so gently. There were deep lines of care in her mild face, shadows under her eyes, as if tears often rested there. It had been, and it was still, a hard trial to her mother's heart, to watch Agnes wasting day by day on that couch, from which there was no hope that she would ever rise again.

Poor Agnes! pale, patient Agnes! The wild,

fleet-footed mountain maiden, with whom, only eighteen months ago, Janita had climbed the craggy watercourses, and raced over the heathery woodlands. Agnes, swiftest of runners, skilfullest of rowers, most graceful of the skaters who sped over Inverallan loch in frosty December time — she was, indeed, sadly changed. Yet, though it was grievous to see her young life wearing out, that grief had no bitterness. For the life within was full of beauty. The calm face told of holy thoughts, which had their home in the soul. There might be gloom and anxiety elsewhere in that rambling old Wimpole Street house, but there was always peace round the couch where the young girl lay. That was always a bright spot, a little sanctuary, where murmuring never came, nothing but light and quietness.

What a strange feeling crept over Janita Raeburn as she found herself once more surrounded by the old household belongings which she remembered from earliest childhood. Everything was just the same as in Inverallan Manse. There was the great dining-table, with its shut-down leaves on each side, the table under which she and Bell and Willie and Agnes used to play at “keeping house,”

when Dr. and Mrs. Home had gone out to tea. And the ugly little gods, sent over by a missionary brother in China, one of them so like old Mr. Ross, the precentor in the kirk. And at the left-hand corner of the fireplace, with Agur the manse cat purring upon it, was the many-coloured stool of tapestry work, done by Mrs. Home in her school-days. A wonderful piece of artistic skill, representing Neptune in his ocean car, surrounded by very angular waves, funny-shaped waves, which provoked Willie and Janita to many a stifled laugh as they knelt by it learning their catechism on a Sabbath afternoon. Oh ! that old stool, how many, many memories it brought back ! And everything was arranged in just the same way as she remembered at the manse, even to the little china cups and saucers on the cheffonier, and the wreath of family profiles in black and white, which surrounded Dr. Home's portrait over the fireplace. Janita could almost have fancied herself back again in the dear old Scottish home, only that instead of Inverallan loch, with its ferny islands and pine-clad hills, those narrow windows looked out upon a London street, where Italian boys, with brown eyes and pinched cheeks, were grinding away at their organs, and

beggar women, with graduated rows of children in white pinafores, were singing ballads and dropping curtseys for stray half-pence. The only great city street Janita had ever seen since she and her uncle stayed all night in Edinburgh on their way from the manse to Meadowthorpe. And how long ago that night seemed now !

Towards evening, Willie came in. He looked very bright and happy. Janita was glad to know that his love had come and gone so lightly, not leaving a single hard line upon his face, or stealing one beam away from his laughing blue eyes, those blue eyes which Janita used to admire so much as she and Willie learned their lessons together in the manse study, sitting on the same chair, their arms round each other's necks. And when he shook hands with her, he looked into her face frankly and straightforwardly, as if no ghost of dead love had ever passed between them. It was all right again. She need not grieve for him any more. She never need have grieved for him at all. Though he did say, that night in the Aspens drawing-room whilst Miss Hepzibah was looking over her flannel bundles, that life would never be worth anything to him now, still its sweetness was coming back.

He had learned the blessed lesson of forgetfulness.

When he had gone away, Agnes told her foster sister that Willie was engaged to a very nice young lady, the daughter of the clergyman to whom he was helper.

"Such a very nice young lady, Nyta," said Agnes, as she got Janita's hand into hers and held it fast, "so pretty and simple and good. She is not very rich, but Willie does not care for that, you know. And they are going to be married very soon, for Willie has got a call to a parish in Fife-shire, and he will settle there in about three months. Bell is at the manse now, getting things ready. Are you not glad for him?"

The very same question that Noelline had asked a few months ago, concerning Gavin Rivers. And that question was so hard to answer. But there was no reservation at all in Janita's mind, not the least little touch of abruptness in her voice, as she said that she was indeed very glad for Willie, and she hoped he would be very happy always, for she was quite sure he would make the kindest husband in the world, and deserved to have a good wife.

"Only, you know, Nyta, dear," Agnes continued, "I did feel just a very little bit sorry at

first, before I had seen Gracie. For, somehow, I always thought that Willie would never marry any one else but you, and I am sure papa and mamma thought so too, for he used to be so very fond of you, and talked about you so much, and was so grieved when you went away to Meadowthorpe. But then, you know, you are so different to us now. You have got to know so many of those grand book people, whose names we see in newspapers; and by and by, I suppose, you will be a great authoress yourself. So, perhaps, after all, you would not be quite happy with an ordinary sort of lad like Willie, though I am sure he would have loved you very much. Do you think you would, Nyta?"

Nyta, the old name, the name which she thought to have quite lost, the name which Miss Hepzibah had flung away so scornfully. Spoken too by Agnes Home, how it brought back the dear Inver-allan life again, with its innocent peaceful thoughts, its love that had no sorrow, its friendship that brought only happiness, never grief or care. "Nyta."

Hearing that name now, she almost wished that she could sweep away the new life of thought and feeling. She almost wished that she had stayed

at Inverallan, and married Willie Home, and gone away with him to some quiet Highland manse, far off from all this toil and weariness, this labour of heart and brain. She would have been quietly happy then, not knowing all that was in her, how bitterly she could suffer, how keenly enjoy. Oh ! would it not have been better never to have come to Meadowthorpe, never to have seen Miss Alwyne, or Gavin Rivers, or Longden Narrowby, or any of them ?

Better for herself perhaps, but not better for others.

For after they had given over talking about Willie and been quite silent for a long time, Agnes drew Janita nearer to her, and held her hand faster in those poor thin fingers.

“Nyta, darling,” she said—“you will let me call you Nyta still, will you not, just as we used to do at Inverallan, though you are going to be such a grand woman ?”

“Yes, call me always Nyta.”

“Well, when first I began to be ill, and papa told me what the doctor said, that there was no hope of my ever getting well again, but that I should always have to lie here, perhaps for years

and years, doing nothing but suffering, I had such bitter thoughts about it. It did seem so wrong, such an unjust thing. Because I had never done anything very wicked. I had always tried to do what was right, just the same as Bell and Margot ; and yet they were married and as happy as could be, and I was fastened down here with the best part of my life crushed out ; not able to die either and have done with it out and out, but just wearing on, a trouble to myself and everybody else. Oh ! it seemed such a cruel thing, and I was so angry. But one day mamma brought me a little piece of poetry to read—she had found it in one of the magazines that we take. And as I read it there came quite a new light into my heart, and a strange sort of quietness. It said that some served God in their joys and some in their duties, but others served him in their griefs, and that was the noblest service of all. You remember it, Nyta ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And then I felt that even my poor little life need not be quite wasted, but that God would work it up into his own great purpose, and say to me at last, even to me, ‘ Well done.’ We did not know then that you had written it, but oh !

it made me glad. And the gladness has never gone away. I have it always."

Miss Alwyne had spoken truly. There might be toil, labour, waiting, but the happiness would come. After that, Janita Raeburn grieved no more for the old life, nor murmured that in losing it she had won the power to strengthen others, and by thoughts born out of her own need, to ease those upon whom God had laid heavy burdens.

She knew now why Miss Alwyne had said of that life of hers, that life which sometimes seemed so lonely and cheerless,

"My child, I would not change it for any I have ever known."

And so ended Janita's first day in London.

CHAPTER XVIII.



THAT was a good beginning. It gave her strength. It nerved her to work on cheerily, knowing that she did not work in vain. It was worth much toil to hear such words as Agnes had spoken.

Janita was soon quite settled in her new life. Friends gathered round her. Miss Alwyne's introductions opened the way into choice society. "Ina's" presence was sought in many a stately home, "Ina's" words were read by many who afterwards stretched out their hands to clasp hers in warm gratitude. For her at last it seemed as if the experiment of life would prove a success.

She had brought Bessie Ashton to London. The poor girl pleaded so hard to come with her young mistress, that Janita could not refuse. That was

well done. Janita was able now to speak many a word of sympathy and encouragement, which, had Bessie gone back to her sister at St. Olave's, would have been left unsaid.

There had been one letter from Roy, only one. It came late in the spring. He had arrived safely at Rio, and seemed to have a fair prospect of success in his new situation. In a few weeks he was to start with some fellow-workmen on an expedition into the interior of the country. Perhaps they would be away many months, perhaps until after the end of the year. But as soon as they returned, Roy was to come to England and take Bessie back with him. He thought she would like the country; it was a fine place, plenty of room for a man to make his way, if only he was steady, and not afraid of work. And the sky there was so clear and the sun so bright, no damps and fogs like those which steeped Meadowthorpe nearly all the year round. But the birds and flowers!—oh, if Bessie could see the birds and flowers! So different from anything in the old country. Why, the birds were like flowers themselves, so bright and gay and shining. Only they did not sing. Roy never heard the blackbird now, nor the thrushes that used to warble so sweetly from the

church-yard sycamores. He had to do all the whistling himself out there. But it was a fine country, and Bessie would say so too when she saw it.

All this Bessie Ashton read to Janita when the letter arrived, stopping now and then to wipe some tears out of her eyes, or to quiet down a bright smile of hope which kept coming when Roy talked of the voyage home in about a year, or perhaps a very little longer. He was sure it would not be much longer than a year at the farthest. And then came some sentences for herself alone, sentences that Bessie never showed to anyone. Very short they were, for Roy was not a man of many words; but they served to brighten Bessie's life, and cheer her through the long, long months of waiting, which might have to pass before she could get another letter.

Janita's life was no idle one. Those who work with brain and heart must spend many a weary hour, press through toil of which those who enjoy the fruit of their labour never dream. But she knew that she was doing her right work, the work which God had given her to do, and this thought brought her strength for all effort, and patience for

all waiting. Study and writing occupied her mornings. The evenings, when she was not called abroad into society, were chiefly spent with the invalid Agnes; but sometimes there were long spells of talk with Bessie, who was always thankful for a cheering word, or with Ilsie, the old Scotch nurse, very infirm and feeble now, but who nevertheless dearly loved "a wee bit crack wi' Miss Janita."

Janita soon found out that when the old woman made her appearance at the door with a clean apron, hair uncommonly smooth, and white cap put on with special care, she had come with a view to conversation. So she would lay aside her writing sometimes, and break off in the midst of a train of thought to listen to her nurse's tales of long-ago times; of the voyage home; of the pale, silent Mrs. Rivers; the fairy-like Noelline, "that bonnie wee lassie wi' gowden locks;" or of Gavin, the wilful lad, who was always getting into mischief amongst the sailors.

Old Ilsie little knew how eagerly her words were heard when, in homely Scottish phrase, she began to talk of the "braw laddie," how he used to delight in all manner of bold and daring exploits, how he would climb aloft and wave his cap from

the top-mast, while the ladies shrieked below and the captain eyed him curiously, half vexed, half proud of the boy. And how, as Ilsie paced up and down with baby Janita in her arms, he would stroke the pale little face and lay the tiny fingers on his rough sunburnt hands.

“And surely, lassie, it was the glamour he cast ower ye, for ye were aye still and peacefu’ like when I put ye intil his arms. He was a gay braw laddie, was Maister Gavin. I didna like the t’other lassie sae weel, she were of an unco’ deceitfu’ disposition, and wad no shrink from tellin’ a lee; and yet ye couldna be vexed wi’ her, for she was richt bonnie, and had such shinin’ gowden ringlets. Ah,” continued the old woman, smoothing down her apron, “Miss Noelline maun be a gran’ leddie the noo, gin she’s livin, wi’ her saft voice and her hazel een and her winsome ways.”

And then Janita told her that Noelline was living, and that she was indeed very “winsome,” and that she had married a handsome colonel, and was actually residing in that big town of London.

“Gude guide us! Wha wad ha thocht it!” exclaimed Ilsie, lifting up her hands.

Janita was almost ready to say the same thing

herself, when after she had been about six months at the old house in Wimpole street, Bessie Ashton came into her writing-room with a card, a black-edged card, bearing the name of Mrs. Colonel Gore.

Janita pushed aside the crimson curtain which separated her little study from the drawing-room, and there stood Noelline, gay, elegant, fascinating, as in the days of her maidenhood. Nay, Janita thought that in that deep mourning dress, with transparent folds of crape fluttering round the golden hair, and contrasting with the rose and ivory tints of her complexion, Gavin's sister looked more beautiful than ever. Mrs. Rivers had been dead about two months, long enough for the first burst of her daughter's sorrow to have worn away, leaving behind it that gentle tinge of sadness, which harmonised nicely with the crape flounces and black embroidered handkerchief. It was tiresome rather, "poor mamma" dying just when she did, in the very height of an unusually gay season, and when the Colonel's lady had so many balls and dinner engagements on hand. If it had only been a few months later, when most of the families had left town for the sea-side, it would have been so much more convenient. But, as Mrs. Gore observed sweetly, "we

must bow to Providence." And then she wrote out a list of mourning articles to be sent from one of the leading west-end establishments.

I know it is very inconsistent to represent Noelline Rivers as happy and comfortable. It is unjust that, after having quenched the sunshine out of two human lives, any should remain to brighten her own. Yet Noelline *was* happy in her way. Her peccadilloes had not been visited upon her, like those of Bessie Ashton. Her reckoning was yet to come. At present she was the pet of society, the spoiled favourite of drawing-rooms and evening-parties. As in Meadowthorpe, so in Belgravia. Every one said, "What a charming woman!—how sweet, how elegant!"

True, she had not very much of what is called home-enjoyment. Colonel Gore might be very proud of his wife, but he did not spend much of his time with her. He went to his club early in the day, and rarely returned until evening, when, if they had not company at home, some ball, or opera, or conversazione, kept them out until the small morning hours. So that the husband and wife rarely had a quiet time together, except over the breakfast-table, and even then he had his news-

paper to read, and she her letters. But Noelline did not grieve over that. She liked society. She doted on quadrille and dinner-parties, and elegant little evening entertainments. So long as the Colonel filled her purse well, she could dispense with his company, except when it was needed as an escort to places of public amusement. Of course she was very fond of him, and they got on very well together, and all that sort of thing, but that did not prevent her from enjoying society and living most of her time in it. Mrs. Gore had made a very successful match. She had hit the mark at which she aimed—a good position, and money enough to sustain it.

“Oh! you naughty little thing!” she said caressingly, as she held out her gloved hand to Janita. “You have been in town since February, and you never let me know. I learned it by the merest accident from my sister Elene. That was too cruel of you, now. But, what a sweet little fern-case—*do* let me look!”

And Noelline skimmed gracefully as ever across the room, to examine those clusters of moss and maiden hair which Gavin Rivers had helped Janita to arrange not so very long ago.

"These pretty things came from Meadowthorpe. I know they did. I remember them so well in your nice drawing-room at the Aspens. Gavin always said you had such perfect taste in arranging leaves and flowers. And how was poor old Meadowthorpe looking when you left it? Insufferable place! I often wonder how I managed to drag through six months in such a nutshell, and amongst such a set of people, too. I always said I never enjoyed any conversation worth listening to, except when I came to the Aspens. But then you know we were such very good friends, were we not, Janita, darling?"

"Oh! yes. I used to spend some pleasant hours at the Hall."

"Yes, you were a great favourite with us all, especially my brother. And the dear old Professor. I was so concerned to hear of his death. We all thought so much of him, such a very dear old man. You would hear of Gavin's marriage, I suppose?"

All the light that could find its way in through those tall, narrow windows, fell upon Janita's face; but though Mrs. Colonel Gore searched that face keenly, she could not detect a quiver in the calm

features, nor hear even the slightest tremor in the voice which replied,

“Yes, we heard of the marriage. It took place before I left Meadowthorpe. I hope Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were quite well when you heard from them.”

“Yes, thank you. I saw them—let me see—when did I see them?—ah! only a few weeks ago.”

And Mrs. Gore glanced at her crape flounces, and put her embroidered handkerchief to her eyes for a second or two.

“I was down at poor mamma’s death. Poor mamma! she went very suddenly at last, though you know for years she had been quite an invalid. They were both very well then, and very happy—I mean, you know, very happy in each other.”

“Yes, I understand.”

“Though, of course, Gavin felt poor mamma’s death very much—he could not help feeling it very much. And Elene, too, Elene was very much attached to dear mamma. But they are very happy in each other. They are so admirably suited. You know Mrs. Gavin is not a remarkably clever person, not what is called intellectual.”

Janita did not know young Mrs. Rivers intimately. She had seen enough of her, however, to

acquiesce in Noelline's opinion of her mental abilities. Therefore she answered accordingly, and Noelline continued,

"No, not intellectual. I never did think my brother Gavin would choose an intellectual woman for his wife. Clever men rarely do. I do not think it would be well for them to do so. Would it, now?"

"That depends, I suppose, upon circumstances."

"Yes, exactly so, upon circumstances, you know; when there is no disparity, or anything of that sort, but Elene suits him quite well. She is so yielding, so very sweet and amiable. They gave me a day or two on their return from Paris, and she looked positively charming."

Janita said she was very glad to hear it. Speaking now to Mrs. Colonel Gore, just the old feeling came over her of trying to drink out of a glass where there is no wine, only a few make-believe bubbles sparkling round the brim. Something held her back from saying any but the merest commonplaces, trite, unmeaning expressions which have been tossed backwards and forwards in social intercourse until all the life is bruised out of them. Mrs. Colonel Gore chatted on in her easy, graceful style.

“And so, Janita, darling, they tell me that you have really come out as an authoress, and that the literary circles are quite ringing with your praises. Do you know, I would not believe it when Francis first showed me one of your papers in the London Magazine? I understand you are quite one of the lions of society now.”

“I am living here quietly with Dr. and Mrs. Home, and I enjoy it very much,” said Janita. And something in her manner seemed to imply, “We will quit that subject, if you please.” Of all women, Noelline was the last to whom she could speak of her real life, its toils or pleasures or disappointments.

“Ah, well, you are very modest, and it is quite right for you to talk in that way. But we all know what a great lady you are becoming. I assure you I feel quite afraid of you now. An authoress, you know, is such a very alarming thing. Now, does not everyone say an authoress is a very alarming thing?”

No reply this time, only a remark that the weather was bright and clear for London. Mrs. Colonel Gore chatted on for a few minutes longer, and then rose to take leave. Janita could shake

hands with her now more calmly than the last time they parted in that drawing-room at the Aspens.

"You will come and see me, will you not?" said Gavin's sister, as she held her young friend's hand in a needlessly long clasp. "You will come and spend a quiet little evening with us very soon. Now that I have found you out, I must make the most of you before you get quite too grand for us. We do not see any company at present, you know, in consequence of poor dear mamma's death; but if you will come in a very quiet way, just as you used to do at the Hall, I shall be so glad. Now, do say you will come."

Janita said that some day she certainly would come down to Weston Place.

"Ah, that is so kind of you. And do let it be very soon. I really cannot fix a day now, for we are so choked with engagements, quiet ones, you know. But I will send you a note as soon as I get home. It will be a great pleasure to us both to see you again."

So Mrs. Colonel Gore went away, leaving a delicious waft of perfume behind her in the Wimpole Street drawing-room. But somehow or other, the

note never came to hand, and Janita was never sent for to spend that quiet evening in Weston Place. Which little omission did not cause her much regret.

The time wore on, month after month, month after month, until Janita had been more than a year in London.

Willie Home married and went away with his bride to the manse of Strathellet, a secluded little village in the Highlands, whence he often wrote to his mother, telling her how very comfortable he was, and what a capital housekeeper Gracie made. The dinners were exquisite. And such short-cakes! And Bell had got the Manse so nicely done up, all papered and painted throughout, and none of the chimneys smoked, and there was a stove in the kitchen which roasted beef beautifully. Willie's married experience promised to be very bright indeed, quite above the common walk of virtuous life.

Agnes wasted away day by day, her pale face growing more and more beautiful as the soul got ready for its everlasting home. She was very happy. God sent heaven's own brightness for that which earth had taken away, and gave His

angels charge concerning the patient child for whom other friends could do so little. There was always rest, always peace in the room where Agnes Home waited for death.

Janita kept working steadily on, making way in her profession, gradually winning for herself name and position and independence. It was hard work, though. Now, the lintie did sometimes sing for pain, and not for gladness. Many thoughts were won, as the sweetest thoughts will always be, through tears. But Janita was content. For, though it might not be brilliantly happy, yet no life could be other than worthy which had in it so much of duty as God had put into hers; whilst there were those around her whose path she could brighten, who would miss her service of love were that service withdrawn. Janita was content.

Only sometimes, when the cares and trials of the day were over, when the tired brain had leave to rest, and the busy hands to fold themselves for a little season, when she returned late from some gay conversazione, or choice literary gathering, where she had mingled with the great world of London society, and listened to the praises of titled people, or the glorious thoughts of those who had

written their names on the great scroll of Fame, Janita would come back again to her quiet study, and sitting in the easy chair by the window, close her eyes, to see once more the old familiar landscape—the elm trees of Meadowthorpe lane, the long, level, sea-like plains of marsh and meadow land, the slant sunlight quivering through the tall flag-leaves, the herons standing amongst the reeds, the forget-me-nots and lilies whispering to each other from sedgy banks, the whitethorn tree by the dyke-side, beyond it the Hall and the church, and Miss Alwyne's cottage. Waking, she looked through rain-splashed windows down the long dreary street, where the lamplight was streaming over the glazed cape of a policeman, or perhaps upon the pale, wan face of some poor castaway, who, if she could have folded her sinful hands, and closed for a little while those bold eyes of hers, might, perhaps, have recalled scenes as peaceful as any upon which Janita had been dreaming.

And all that time Bessie Ashton sat up in her little bedroom, weeping over the happy days that were gone, praying for strength to bear life's great loneliness. Poor Bessie!

CHAPTER XIX.



OR no letter came from Roy. Summer passed on. Hot August days set in, driving away those of the London people who had money and leisure enough, to Alpine mountains, or the cool breezes of the sea-side. Scarcely had they come back, when Autumn poured its yellow tide of fog down the streets; then furs and rich-coloured velvets peeped out in the Regent Street drapers' shops; grocers began to decorate their windows with wonderful devices in ginger and lemons; book-sellers sent out lists of works suitable for Christmas presents; people made arrangements for asking their country cousins up to the great cattle show; and parents, who had little boys home from school, bespoke tickets for the pantomimes. The old year was rung out with due mirth and merriment.

Twelfth Night came, with cakes and snapdragon. The little boys, after receiving shillings and half-crowns, and much parental counsel, went back to school. Days lengthened. Covent Garden showed here and there a bunch of purple violets; flower girls thrust little pots of snowdrops and crocuses in your face as you walked down the street; Spring fashions were advertised, and families who were going to remove began to pack up glass and china in anticipation of Lady Day.

But no letter from Roy, and the time kept stealing on, until he had been away more than a year and a half. Whether that expedition into the interior of the country had proved disastrous, whether Roy had perished amongst the jungles, or fallen into the hands of the savages with which Bessie's imagination peopled those far-off regions, she knew not. Perhaps he had sailed for home, and the vessel had been wrecked, and even now he was lying far down on the ocean floor, its blue waves tossing over him, its slimy weed binding the hands she had so often held in hers. Or perhaps—cruellest thought of all—he had seen some dark-eyed Portuguese maiden, whose southern face and soft, sweet speech had lured him away from the

old love, casting their spell about him, until the memory of the English girl had quite died out, and the sound of her voice, and the brightness of her smile, become forgotten things.

Poor Bessie! It was hard to live on week after week, month after month, with nothing but that one letter to comfort her. Just that one letter, whose words were very dim now with the hot tears that had fallen upon them. Daily, as she brought the "Times" in to her young mistress, Bessie's anxious, hungry eyes asked the question which her lips could not speak. And Janita would answer—

"Yes, Bessie, the South American mail is in."

Then for two or three days there would be terrible, heart-wearing suspense, deepening into agony as the often-recurring ring was heard, accompanied by the words—

"No foreign letters to-day."

And after one or two visits, the postman would say—

"No foreign letters this month. The mail is all given out now."

Then Bessie dragged her weary steps up-stairs into the bed-room which looked out over those crowded London streets, and she prayed that if

Roy had indeed forgotten her, God would let her die.

The girl was fast losing her youthful beauty now. The roses had quite faded out of her cheeks, her eyes grew dim with long hours of weeping. Loose young men no longer stared at her in the streets, or called a blush to her face by their bold words. And ladies who came to the old house in Wimpole Street, never said one to another, as they used to do twelve months ago—

“Dear me! what a remarkably pretty girl, what a sweet complexion!”

If Bessie could have seen that portrait, which she got taken at the Martinmas Fair, soon after she went to live with Miss Hepzibah, the little photograph for which she paid three shillings of her hard-earned wages, and then an extra shilling for painting, because, as the artist said, with a smile and a bow, it was such a pity those beautiful cheeks of hers should not have proper justice done to them—if Bessie could have seen that portrait, she would scarcely have known herself again. But she could not see it, for Roy had taken it away with him to America, saying that he should look at it every day, and many times a day. And did he ever look

at it at all? Or did he ever think about her? Or was the face that he loved best, a foreign face with olive tints upon it, and the flash of southern fire in its dark eyes?

Janita did the best she could by kind, hopeful words, to comfort the poor girl whose life seemed wearing away with this slow torture. But her own heart misgave her sometimes, especially when, after Roy had been gone nearly two years, there came a letter from Miss Alwyne, who had asked Mr. Rivers to write to his friend in Rio. Mr. Rivers gave the gentleman's answer to Miss Alwyne, and Miss Alwyne sent it to Janita. The party which had been sent into the interior of the country had returned, with the exception of Roy and two other men, who had never been heard of since. Most likely the natives had lured them away, or they had gone off elsewhere in search of better wages. Clever workmen were at a premium in that neighbourhood. And Roy was very skilful, he would easily make his way and earn money, when he knew a little of the country. That was what the gentleman said.

Bessie hoped no more after that.

Time passed on, bringing Janita Raeburn fame

and success. The simple little country girl, trembling three years ago under Noelline's artful words, had won for herself no mean place in literary circles. Some of the best people in London—using that phrase in its social sense of rank and position—were proud to claim her as their acquaintance; and to see her face, very calm and noble now, amidst the jewelled throng of their aristocratic friends. Sometimes at these gatherings, Janita met her old acquaintance, Mrs. Gore. The Colonel's lady was always overflowing with cordiality; *so* delighted to see her dear friend Miss Raeburn again, and it was so naughty of Janita never to come down to West-on Place. They had never had that quiet little evening together yet, that Janita had promised her such a long time ago; and she was so anxious to have a nice cosy talk about Meadowthorpe, poor old Meadowthorpe! She scarcely ever heard anything about it now, she said; for Elene wrote so seldom, and when she did write, it was all about home affairs, new furniture that they had been getting for the Hall, or alterations which were being made in the house and garden.

“For you know, Janita dear, Elene is so proud of her home, her home is really everything to her.”

Indeed. Well, that was just as it ought to be. A woman's home should be everything to her. If it is not, there must be something wrong somewhere. But as Elene was so proud of her home, there could be nothing wrong at the Hall. And then Janita would say quietly enough, that she hoped Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were quite well.

"Oh yes, both perfectly well, thank you. Only Gavin, poor fellow, is bored to death with the dullness of the place. Meadowthorpe, you know, is such a wretchedly dull place. Of course it was impossible to say such a thing, when I lived there; country people are always so taken up with their own village, but really poor demented old Meadowthorpe!"

And Noelline made a very expressive gesture with her white hands. That was just what poor old Meadowthorpe was.

"And then, Janita, my brother was never cut out for life in the country. He cannot bear it, you know."

No, Janita did not know that. Indeed, she remembered hearing the new steward say, as they rowed through the flag leaves of Meadowthorpe dyke, that he loved the country, and could gladly

live in it always. Tastes might change, though. Few people kept the same tastes all through life. But she was very sorry that Mr. Rivers did not find Meadowthorpe a pleasant neighbourhood.

"Yes, he has been tiring of it, for some months. He told me last time I was down there, that he should come to London shortly, to see the Duke, and ask him for an appointment abroad. You know the Duke has extensive property in South America, and Gavin knows a few people over there. I daresay he could manage to get along pleasantly enough in Rio."

"Yes," said Janita, in an absent sort of tone, as she watched the dancers floating past, their jewels sparkling under the great chandelier; "but would foreign life suit Mrs. Rivers?"

"Oh, Elene would stay behind. I don't think anything would induce Elene to leave her home. You know she is so very proud of it. Elene's home is everything to her."

"It must indeed be everything to her."

And that was all Janita said. But she could not help just one little sigh, partly for herself, partly for Gavin Rivers. She knew that no home, not the proudest in the land, would have kept her

from going anywhere with him. The dreariest desert island would have been home, so only he was there. Then Noelline's hand was laid upon hers, and that voice, sweet and musical as ever, began again.

"I was talking, was I not? about your coming to spend a quiet little evening with us, just the same as you used to do at the Hall. Now, when shall it be? You must not put me off again, I will not be put off any more. You don't know how anxious Francis and I are to have you to spend a quiet little evening with us. Let me see, now."

And Mrs. Colonel Gore looked at the ivory tablets suspended to her fan.

"Dear me, when *have* I a spare evening? These engagements are such a nuisance. Next Monday we go to that tiresome dinner-party at the General's. Francis is very particular about my paying proper attention to his uncle. The stupid old man is as rich as a nabob, and of course the property will all come into the Gore family. Well, we go there on Monday, and then Tuesday I have an engagement at Lady Heron's ball, and Wednesday—let me see, what is there on Wednesday? Oh! I remember now, Francis promised I should go with a set of

people to the opera, and Thursday we are somewhere else, I really forget where just now. We are positively crushed with engagements, so tiresome, is it not? I can scarcely ever get a quiet evening to myself. But there is Major Hallet coming for that quadrille I promised him an hour ago. I shall see you again, Janita darling, and then we can fix a time."

So Mrs. Colonel Gore buttoned her gloves, adjusted her bracelets, and then took Major Hallet's arm for the quadrille, that quiet little evening far away as ever. Perhaps, as Janita watched them keeping time to the music, she thought how much love is wasted in this world, and wondered why the new steward should find Meadowthorpe such a dull place. He had told her more than once that life had been a pleasant thing for him since he came there.

But no one knew anything about these thoughts. Least of all the honorary secretary, whose office it was to send out cards for the grand soir  e to be held in a few weeks at the ——— Rooms, that very grand affair, at which so many great people were expected to be present—authors, painters, poets, besides half the rank and beauty of the metropolis. Perhaps,

had he known, he would not have distributed the cards as he did. At all events, one came to Miss Raeburn and one to Dr. Home, who usually accompanied her to these great gatherings.

Still no news of Roy. Three years he had been gone, and only one letter in all that long time. Bessie had ceased to put the oft-repeated question—

“Please, Miss Jane, has the American mail come in?”

It was no use asking any more now. All was over. Roy was dead, his bones lying in some tropic jungle, trodden down by beasts of prey, or tossing to and fro in the deep blue sea, unwatched, unburied. Or, if living, he had forgotten her. Over the love once so fond and faithful, had passed that death from which there is no resurrection, the death of forgetfulness.

Bessie lived on still, but her life had lost all its freshness. It is not given to everyone to die when living becomes so hard. She went through her work sadly and silently. At night she would think about Meadowthorpe, the cottage where she and Roy might have been so happy, the little cottage with its slip of garden, its warm fireside, its lattice window filled with roses and geraniums, which Roy

had tended so carefully before that great trouble came. Once more she stood in Meadowthorpe lane, beneath the elm-trees, as she had stood the night before he went away, her hand in his, his voice speaking words of hope and comfort, telling her he would never forget, but love her always to the end. Then she would fall asleep and dream that the long looked-for letter had come; that all was right again, Roy not dead, not faithless either. Sweet dream, from which with a great thrill of joy, joy that in its intensity touched the verge of pain, she woke and saw the grey dawn stealing in through the windows, and heard the slow monotonous street cries, rousing her once more to toil and weariness and despair.

CHAPTER XX.



THE night of the great gathering arrived. A long line of equipages slowly filing past the colonnaded entrance of the — Rooms, footmen in liveries of all colours assisting pyramids of lace and satin up the carpeted steps which led into the hall, policemen keeping order with shouts and staves, clusters of shabbily-dressed men and women pressing eagerly forward to catch a glimpse of the ladies as they alighted from their carriages—these signs proclaimed to passers-by that the much-talked of *soirée*, the event, in fact, of an unusually quiet London season, was taking place.

Within, the prospect was quite overpowering. Before half the company had arrived, the — Rooms contained such an assemblage of rank and intellect and beauty as had never before been

gathered together, even in the metropolis. So the morning papers, one and all of them, affirmed.

And indeed, after making due allowance for the exaggeration of morning papers, the *soirée* was a most brilliant and successful affair. In addition to the leading notabilities of the day, men and women whose names were household words, familiar as those of our own kings and queens, there were lesser lights, civil, military and aristocratic, who made up by splendour of appearance what they lacked in fame. There were foreign officers with orders of merit blazing on their uniforms, fair-haired Germans and fascinating Italians, Spaniards in whose dark eyes the old Moorish pride flashed, and brisk little Frenchmen, all smiles and compliments and curled whiskers. There were stout old dowagers sailing about in gold and silver brocade; countesses and baronesses whose jewelled coronets reflected the glitter of a thousand lights; sparkling brunettes with eyes that outshone the diamonds in their hair, and blond beauties whose pearls were not more white than the bosoms on which they rose and fell. And as my Lady This and my Lady That brought her plumes and point lace to grace the show, and as fresh wreaths and flowers and

streamers came crowding in, and as uniform after uniform spangled with orders of merit sprinkled its scarlet lustre over the room, a looker-on might be reminded of some huge kaleidoscope, whose fragments are for ever changing and re-arranging themselves into fresh, more brilliant forms.

Dr. Home was soon called upon to give up his charge. Janita was first claimed by Sir Harry Montellan, a friend of the artist whom she had met years ago at Miss Alwyne's. Sir Harry was a hale noble old man of seventy, formerly English consul at Rio, now resident in the neighbourhood of London. His three daughters were with him at the *soirée*, all noble women too, women who for grace and dignity might have been the princesses of Portuguese society when poor Mrs. Rivers, sleeping so quietly now beneath her marble slab at the south end of Meadowthorpe church, was its queen. And when she had been pacing the room for some time with Sir Harry and his daughters, others came up; some, literary people full of new books and the gossip of the great publishing houses; some, pleasant genial acquaintances who made no pretensions to cleverness, and whose conversation was therefore all the more refreshing; some, foreigners

on travel who procured an introduction with a view to taking notes and printing them; some, would-be-intellectual ladies and gentlemen, from whom she had to listen to stale compliments and praises, which, spoken loudly with great show of smiles and bows, lost all their sweetness.

Sometimes, too, Mrs. Colonel Gore, a misty vision of white lace and roses, wandered past, chatting with a braided officer or moustached Frenchman, for whom she had smiles and glances quite as fascinating as those with which, five years ago, she first beguiled Francis Gore into the toils of matrimony. But never so much absorbed in flirtation as to forget a word or two in passing, a sweet affectionate look for her dear Miss Raeburn.

"Ah! Janita darling," she would say, "you don't know how I am longing to get possession of you, just for one moment, but you are really so popular to-night that it is impossible to get a word with you. Do give me five minutes now, will you not, next time we meet? It is so cruel of you always to pass me by, you naughty little thing!"

And then, playfully patting Janita's cheek with her bouquet, the Colonel's lady would glide on, her

lace draperies shaking out wafts of perfume, the people saying as she passed them—

“How charming! what a graceful creature!”

For a little while, but only for a little while, Janita enjoyed the brilliant scene. Tired at last of small talk and introductions, she found her way to a quiet seat by Madame d'Eseglio, the ex-consul's eldest daughter. They might have been resting there for half an hour when Sir Harry joined them.

“Pardon me, Miss Raeburn,” he said, “for interrupting you; but I wish to introduce you to a very old friend of mine, a friend whom I have met this evening unexpectedly, after many years of separation. I knew him abroad when he was quite a boy. I believe he knows you are here, but I would not tell him what a treat I had in store for him. He will be so delighted.”

And the old gentleman, who had not quite lost all the buoyancy and gallantry of youth, bowed low as he gave his arm to Janita. He led her away to a distant part of the room, where, beside a stand of flowering shrubs whose glossy sprays hinted of far-off sunshine and fresh air, a lady and gentleman were waiting for them.

Like a dream when morning comes, that gay

scene with its waving plumes, its glittering jewels, its sheen of gold and silver, its perfumed air, its hum of many voices, passed away. Instead, there came up before her a quite different picture, a level reach of marsh and meadow land through which Meadowthorpe dyke trailed its sleepy current; pollard willow trees shaking in the wind; slant rays of light quivering through the tall flag leaves and upon little ripples made by the oarsman amongst lilies and forget-me-nots. Sir Harry pronounced the customary formula of introduction. Then there was the touch of a great hand upon her own. Once more Janita Raeburn and the steward of Meadowthorpe stood face to face.

He had never seen her since she sat in the Professor's pew at church, a week or two before Noelline's marriage. For after his engagement to Miss Somers, Gavin Rivers always spent his Sundays at St. Olave's Deanery, and of set purpose he avoided meeting Janita in or about the village.

That was nearly four years ago. Then she was little more than a girl, a quick, interesting girl, who had first won his fancy and afterwards his love by her shy, pretty ways, and the freshness of

her thoughts, those thoughts which she spoke out sometimes with such wilful freedom, sometimes with such half-frightened quietness. She was a woman now, a calm, graceful woman. Those who knew her in the old Meadowthorpe days might perhaps remember her still, for there was the same smile, the same kindling of the changeful countenance, the same voice, rich as ever with passion and feeling. But over these now there was a veil of womanly reserve. Something else, too. There was the quiet pride of one who has made for herself a worthy name, who has worked her own way to fame and success. Only putting these aside, forgetting them, if possible, there was the "little Janita" of four years ago.

Society had taught her what most learn who live much in it, reticence and self-control. Her hand did not tremble at all as she held it out to Elene's husband. There was no quiver in her voice, nothing but the simplest friendliness as she replied, in answer to Sir Harry's introduction—

"We do not need this ceremony, thank you. Mr. Rivers and I have met before. We know each other very well."

Gavin looked down upon her, keeping her hand

still in his, so astonished as quite to forget the customary phrases which politeness requires when such very old friends meet again after long parting. Was that indeed Miss Raeburn, the distinguished young lady of whom he had heard so much, the popular writer in whose praise so much had been said and written? For Gavin Rivers, in common with most other men, had peculiar and not altogether pleasant notions about women who follow literature as a profession. He pictured them to himself as a sort of intermediate sex, without either feminine gentleness or masculine vigour, creatures with inkstains on their fingers and a perpetual frown on their lean, colourless faces. And though it had been very difficult to blot out the sweet memory of Janita's youth and replace it by an ideal like this, Gavin Rivers had succeeded at last. It was a sort of relief to think of her in this way. It atoned in some measure for the bitter disappointment of his daily home life. Even the lazy figure that sat in the softest easy chair at Meadowthorpe Hall, with its white eyelids dropped and its jewelled hands for ever folded in its lap, was preferable to such a dry, logical, lath-and-plaster piece of womanhood as Janita Raeburn,

in virtue of her new profession, must have become.

Mrs. Colonel Gore helped on the delusion as far as she could, never expecting that a chance meeting like the present would dispel it. The girl was exceedingly altered, she used to say to her brother whenever she went down to Meadowthorpe to spend a few days with "dear Elene," quite losing her pretty youthful ways, and stiffening into a complete woman of mind, in fact the very ideal of a literary lady. And so cold, so very cold and distant. These strong-minded women think no one worth speaking to, out of their own set.

So Mr. Rivers might well forget his politeness, until reminded of it by a cold touch and whispered "Gavin, my dear," from the mould of blanc-mange which society called his wife. For there was nothing to mark the logical female or "strong-minded woman" in the lady who stood before him now, noticeable even amongst that brilliant throng for grace and womanly beauty.

Janita was dressed in some soft material of silver grey, with folds of black lace sweeping over it to the ground. In her hair, that dark shining

hair which used to provoke Miss Hepzibah's wrath by its want of judicious tidiness, she wore neither flowers nor jewels, only a few laurel leaves, which lay like a coronet over her low forehead. There was something queenly, yet very gentle about her, the sweetness of Gavin's own little Janita, joined with something not his own, something which never could be his now. It might have been his once, but he had put it away from him and chosen instead this cold, jelly-like mass of amiability, whose fat white arm was resting upon his.

Gavin and Elene were very happy in each other. So Mrs. Colonel Gore had said, three years ago. So doubtless she would say now, and with need too; for no ordinary amount of penetration could discover that interesting fact without help. Mr. and Mrs. Rivers had reached a very advanced stage of the indifference which Miss Matilda Vere Aubrey considered such an indispensable requisite of good breeding. "Nothing annoys me so much," the Norman lady used to remark, "as seeing a husband and wife completely taken up with each other. It is so essentially vulgar." And as the Dean's daughter was far too much of a lady to condescend to anything vulgar, she manifested her superior

breeding by sweet indifference to her lord and master, an indifference which sat so beautifully upon her, that it would have been the height of impropriety to find fault with it.

As for Gavin Rivers—but after the first glance into his face, Janita could quite believe that he found Meadowthorpe a very dull neighbourhood.

They said but little to each other, for Sir Harry Montellan was standing beside them all the time. Sir Harry was so delighted that two such old friends had met again. He had not the slightest idea that Miss Raeburn had any previous acquaintance with the steward of Meadowthorpe. It was such a very odd thing that he should chance to bring them together in that way, so very peculiar, was it not?

“But then,” as the kind-hearted old gentleman went on to say, “London is such a place for accidental meetings. Everybody meets everybody else in London. So, after all, you see it is not so much more than might have been expected.”

Of course there were polite inquiries about Meadowthorpe and its people. Was the place very much changed? Miss Raeburn supposed it would be. She had heard that all the new cottages were put up now, and trees planted along the Muchmarsh

road. Those trees would be a very great improvement. Plenty of foliage was such an addition to any country place. And in Meadowthorpe trees grew so rapidly, the humid atmosphere of the neighbourhood seemed to suit them. And how were the Meadowthorpe people? Mrs. Cloudie must be very infirm now. And Larry Stead—did he still work in the Duke's yard? And poor old Mr. and Mrs. Royland. Did Mr. Rivers see much of poor old Ben and his wife?

Yes, Mr. Rivers did see them very frequently. They were very much broken down by the loss of their son, unable to work, almost entirely dependent upon charity. Mr. Rivers did not say, though, that it was his charity which had supported them for the last three years. That was a sad affair about poor Roy, a very sad affair. Of course no one expected to hear anything from him again. He was dead, not a doubt of that. Yes, Meadowthorpe was very much improved. So people said who came to the place after an absence of a few years. The trees were growing nicely, and the cottages gave perfect satisfaction. The Duke seemed quite pleased last time he was over the estate. And might Mr. Rivers congratulate Miss Raeburn on the success she had achieved since last

they had the pleasure of meeting? Meadowthorpe was very proud of her former residence there. Miss Raeburn had many friends in Meadowthorpe. Also, Mr. Rivers hoped to do himself the honour of calling in Wimpole Street before he left town. He should very much enjoy spending a quiet hour with an old friend.

To which Miss Raeburn replied that such a call would give her much pleasure. She had many interesting associations connected with Meadowthorpe; friends from that neighbourhood would always be warmly welcomed.

That was all. Nothing about that moonlight night when they stood hand in hand beneath the crumbling old coat of arms over the Professor's door. Nothing about that quiet row down Meadowthorpe dyke. Nothing about the shelving bank and the whitethorn trees, through whose branches the red gables of the Hall made such a pleasant picture. Whilst Janita was saying that she should be most happy to see Mr. and Mrs. Rivers any morning after twelve o'clock, a magnificent baroness in green and gold brocade swept up to them, and introduced her daughter to Miss Raeburn.

Gavin bowed and went away, followed by his

blue satin wife, who remarked, as she gathered up her flounces :

“Gavin, my dear, how very strange ! Not at all like a woman who is in the habit of writing for the press.”

As soon as she could do it politely, Janita disengaged herself from the throng of people around and rejoined Dr. Home, who was sitting in a quiet corner of the room. With him she could be silent, not obliged to keep up that perpetual patter patter of small talk, which, when the thoughts are far away, becomes so burdensome. Only once more, late in the evening, just as she was taking leave of Madame D'Eseglio, she heard Gavin's voice. Mr. Rivers was speaking to his wife. Janita could not see him, for the stand of flowers was between them, but the words were distinct enough :

“Mrs. Rivers, I believe our carriage is waiting.”

Nothing could have been more concise and simple, more like the steward of Meadowthorpe, who never wasted words over anything. But the manner in which they were spoken, the cold, formal, icy tones, tones which no longer held either love or tenderness, the studied courtesy, assumed to hide an indifference which had become habitual—told her

all. Janita did not doubt now that if he went abroad, Gavin Rivers would go alone.


So ended that very grand *soirée* at the —— Rooms. Next morning the fashionable papers gave a full account of it. In some of them the most elegant costumes were particularised, amongst others the Baroness Grimdelwald's green and gold brocade and Mrs. Colonel Gore's suit of Brussels lace. The most distinguished guests were also mentioned. Janita read her own name amongst them. But it was nothing new to read that now.

For a few days the *soirée* was talked about. For a few weeks it was remembered. Then it sank, with all its plumes, and jewels, and starred uniforms, into the deep waters of forgetfulness, only a fragment of it coming to the surface now and then to mark some other event.

"Last year at this time, my dear. Soon after that great affair at the —— Rooms, you know."

"At the —— Rooms? Oh! yes, the *soirée*. I remember. Dear me! I had not thought of that *soirée* for months."

CHAPTER XXI.

ANITA returned from the pomp and splendour of the — Rooms to a home over which the shadow of death was already darkening. Agnes Home had nearly finished her course of patient suffering. A few more wearisome days and nights, a few more words of tender farewell to those whose light and comfort she had always been, and then the end came.

She died one evening towards the close of June, just as the last slant beams of sunlight were finding their way through London smoke and vapour into the quiet little parlour. No one thought she would go away so soon. There was no time to send for Willie or her sister from their far-off highland homes, so only old Ilsie and Janita, besides her father and mother, stood by her at the last.

Agnes Home had no death-bed experience. There was no taking of pencil-notes by her bedside for future use in a published memoir. God had decreed that her life, and not her death, should be the noble thing. Just a very little while before she died, she took hold of Janita's hand and said with a pleasant smile,

"Thank you, Nyta, for showing me the way home."

Then she never spoke any more. After one long loving look upon her father and mother, she closed her eyes for that sleep from which there should be no more waking to pain or weariness. They could not think she was gone, so calm she seemed, so peaceful.

"Aggie, dear."

But there was no reply. It was daylight only, not the light of a living soul any more, that shone over the pale face.

"She's awa noo," old Ilsie whispered. And then she led Janita out of the room, leaving the husband and wife to comfort each other's hearts for this, the first cold touch of death upon their home.

There was no need for bitter grief, though.

Agnes had done her work, and done it nobly. Long her smile had been a benediction in that household, her words its peace and stay. Not less did she bless it now. God took her from the sight of loving eyes, but loving hearts held her still in a bond which no death could part. She was with them always, unseen. The angel of sorrow, passing forth from that home, bade the angel of rest enter it.

“We have no one but you, Nyta,” said Mrs. Home, the night after they had buried Agnes. “You must not leave us now.”

Janita had no wish to go away. There, where God sent her, was her true place. So she stayed and was unto them as a daughter.

Gavin Rivers did not come to the old house in Wimpole Street quite so soon as he had intended. Mrs. Colonel Gore had her own opinion about that visit. She was not particularly anxious that it should be paid at all, and so she found means to delay it day after day until the eve of her brother's return to Meadowthorpe, when she trusted to good fortune and a press of engagements to do away with it altogether.

At first Agnes Home's death was a sufficient excuse for not calling upon Miss Raeburn. Gavin surely would not be so thoughtless as to intrude upon the grief of strangers in such an unseemly manner. True, Miss Raeburn had her own suite of rooms, and might be considered simply as a lodger in the house, but her previous connection with Dr. and Mrs. Home made her quite one of the family, and, therefore, ordinary decorum required that at least a fortnight should elapse before even a visit of ceremony could be paid. And then dear Elene ought to go too. Elene had always had such a great respect for Miss Raeburn, and wished to show her every attention, Gavin must not think of such a thing as calling without Elene, it would seem so unkind. And Noelline, too, wished to offer condolences to her old friend. Though a crowd of engagements had prevented her from paying much attention to the Professor's niece, still, she had always cherished a most sisterly regard for her, and would not on any account fail to observe those little kindnesses which friendship and politeness demand at such times. Mr. and Mrs. Rivers must certainly postpone their visit to Wimpole Street until she could make it convenient to accompany them.

So said Mrs. Colonel Gore, whenever her brother, looking over his list of engagements, mentioned that call upon Janita Raeburn. And even when a proper interval had elapsed since the funeral of poor Agnes, and neither decorum nor etiquette closed the doors of Dr. Home's house against old friends, still it was very easy so to manage matters that when Noelline could go, dear Elene had some shopping to attend to which called her in quite a different direction, and when Elene had a morning to spare, one of Mrs. Gore's very numerous engagements prevented a long call. Those engagements were such a nuisance. She could scarcely ever get a quiet morning to herself, and she really could not think of putting off such an old friend as Janita with just a flying visit of ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. That would look so very ceremonious. She could not think of being so coldly ceremonious with dear Janita, she respected her so very much.

Finally, Noelline discovered, greatly to her grief and disappointment, that it was absolutely impossible to get down to Wimpole Street before her brother and his wife left town for Meadowthorpe. It was such a pity. She really did not know when

she had felt so sorry about anything. She should so have enjoyed a long, quiet call. There was nothing she enjoyed so much as a quiet call upon dear Miss Raeburn ; but it could not be helped. They would send cards. Cards would suffice for the present. Her call should be made by and by, when she had a whole long morning at her disposal. And she would tell Janita how it was that Gavin could not go. A formal call between such old friends was worse than nothing at all.

So the cards were sent the day before Gavin and Elene returned to Meadowthorpe, and the Colonel's lady congratulated herself that that little bit of awkwardness had blown over. What good could possibly have resulted from a long private interview between her brother and the woman he had once loved, the woman he once intended to marry ? Such an interview could only have led to some stupid confession or apology, which was very much better avoided.

"Now, my pet, wouldn't it be the most foolish thing in the world for that brother of ours to go down to Wimpole Street?"

Tip was growing infirm and rheumatic now. He could not shake himself quite so briskly as in

days of yore, but he set his little black head on one side and winked sagaciously.

“Certainly it would, my lady.”

Noelline little thought that whilst she was putting the cards into a crested envelope and writing a sweetly pretty note of condolence to “dear Janita,” Gavin Rivers was on his way to the old house, pondering how best he should make that explanation which, of all others, ought to have been left unmade. For once in her life, Mrs. Gore was foiled.

Many days had passed since the death of Agnes, and Dr. and Mrs. Home had gone to the sea-side, taking poor Bessie Ashton with them, when Janita, summoned out of her little study into the drawing-room, found herself in the presence of Gavin Rivers.

Only in his presence, though. Not in his sight just yet. For in front of the tall, old-fashioned mirror which was fixed into a panel between the two windows, was a case of ferns whose tiny green leaflets seemed to make a perpetual spring in the room. And before these ferns, with his face bent over them, Mr. Rivers stood.

Janita could see that face in the mirror, all but

the eyes. Certainly it was very much altered. If the Meadowthorpe steward wore his own proper expression just now, he was not by any means a loveable person. It was questionable, very questionable, whether any poor woman coming to the Hall for relief or sympathy would, after catching a glimpse of that face, ask for "the Master." Questionable, too, whether "the Master," walking down the village street, would any longer turn aside out of consideration for little boys' marbles, or the dirt pies which, with great expenditure of patience and trouble, they had kneaded together on the public causeway. There was not much promise of kindness now in that face, none of tenderness or sympathy. The four years which had guided Janita Raeburn onward into noble womanhood, bringing with them work, rest, peace, the consciousness of duties well performed, and a life purpose nobly won, had yielded Gavin Rivers nothing but disgust and disappointment. For both of which unpleasant results he had himself to blame, if that was any consolation. He had gone by his own choosing into the prison-house which held him so tightly now. He was the very last person then who ought to complain of its bolts and

bars, those bolts and bars which would never be withdrawn "until death us do part."

Janita had stood within the curtain, watching him. Now she let it fall and roused him from his reverie. Turning round, he met a face—oh, so different from that which wearied him every day of his life by its stale, monotonous tranquillity. It was grave now, but behind the gravity there lay a bright sweetness, just ready to break out like sunshine from a cloud. Janita was content. There could be no question about that.

When the customary greetings had been exchanged, Gavin felt ill at ease. He took hold of the first subject of conversation which presented itself. And that happened to be the case of ferns by which he was still standing.

"I see you retain your old love for green leaves. I helped you to arrange these, four years ago."

"Yes. You know in London it is pleasant to have anything which reminds us of the country. That is why I keep them."

"It is just four years ago," continued Gavin, not heeding how she put away the memories which he would have brought back to her. "If you remember, it was in July, the middle of July, four years

ago, when I came into your uncle's drawing-room, and found you whistling over these ferns. I have often thought about it since."

"Your memory is very good," said Janita smiling. But there was no concealed bitterness in the smile, not the least touch of sarcasm or wounded pride. This man had done her an injustice, and she knew it. Janita Raeburn had not given, without having it won from her—if not by words, at least by those actions which leave no need for words—what women like her give but once in their lives. If he had wronged her, though, the wrong had brought its own healing. She had lost her faith in him, and there is no loss sadder than that. But he had not spoiled her life, as he seemed to have spoiled his own. Nay, had she not to thank him for much of that life's good worth? He had given her its key. He had taught her how much she could enjoy, then how much she could suffer, then how much she could do.

However, that was all past now. With such thoughts as these, she had nothing to do. She and Mr. Rivers had met as friends, who came from the same place, and knew the same people. And so as before, she began to talk about Meadowthorpe and

its interests, about the old scenes, and the old families. And from one well remembered name to another—always keeping far away, though, from anything that should touch too closely a past that was quite past now—the conversation led at last to Roy, poor Roy! Did Mr. Rivers really think the young man was dead? Had anything been heard about him, since that letter from the gentleman with whom he went out?

Yes, Mr. Rivers did think he was dead. There was little room for any other thought. He had written to the English consul at Rio, wishing him to make inquiries; but the inquiries, if ever made—which was doubtful—had led to no result. Things of that kind did sometimes occur, especially in countries where a feeling of enmity prevailed between the natives and European settlers. Mr. Rivers remembered an instance of the same kind himself, twenty years ago, when he was quite a boy. A party set out on an expedition into the interior of the country, and were never heard of again, though all possible inquiries were made respecting them. It had been a painful business throughout, a very painful business; but he did not think anything more could be done, especially as the gentleman to

whom young Royland engaged himself, had left Rio. Poor Bessie must give up hoping. She had better forget him if she could. Forgetfulness was often a great blessing.

And then Mr. Rivers began to talk about Meadowthorpe Marsh, and the lovely sunsets they had in May and June. Did Miss Raeburn remember that row they had once had across Meadowthorpe Marsh?

Janita did remember it, but that was no time to freshen the memory. Because she remembered also, that, though they sat there, in the same room, within reach of each other's hands, there lay between Gavin Rivers and herself a far wider distance than if thousands of miles had parted them. Roy, lying dead in some tropic jungle, or drifting to and fro beneath ocean waves, was much nearer to Bessie than Gavin Rivers could ever be to her now.

At last the trite commonplaces of a morning call were exhausted. Remarks began to flow slowly and at long intervals. But Mr. Rivers did not go away. He seemed restless and perplexed. At last he began to walk up and down, a sure sign that something was vexing him. Apparently locomotion was a merciful outlet for the pent-up irritability of his disposition.

"Janita," he said, at last. It was the first time he had called her by that old name. "I came to tell you something, and you must hear it before I go. You say you remember that afternoon, four years ago, in the drawing-room at the Aspens?"

"Yes, I do remember it."

"I meant to have told you then, what it is too late to tell you now. But we will let that pass. You may remember that Longden Narrowby called before I left. When I went back to the Hall, my sister told me that you were engaged to him, and that by coming to see you so frequently, I was trespassing upon the rights of another man. I could not meet you again, Janita, as *only* a friend. You know the rest."

Janita made no reply. If, as Gavin's words revealed to her all that might have been, some regretful thoughts stirred in her heart, those regrets never passed into speech. He had not been false to her, then. This Gavin Rivers was still an honourable man. Instead of deceiving her, another had deceived him. She might give him back her respect, her esteem, even a little of her trust. But nothing more than that.

"You know the rest, Janita."

"Yes."

"I believed what my sister told me, partly because I knew Mr. Narrowby came very frequently to your house, partly because Noelline gave me her authority. Mrs. Narrowby told her, she said."

"Then Mrs. Gore told you a falsehood. That never was true, and it never will be."

Janita kept back all the passionate anger which rose within her as she spoke these words, but she did let a touch of pride ring through her voice. Was Longden Narrowby, with his weak prettiness, his yielding, unstable disposition, his feeble will, that could neither do nor dare any worthy thing, a fitting companion for her? Could he rule her life? Could she ever be proud to obey him? Perhaps Gavin Rivers noticed the quick disdainful gesture which she unconsciously used as she flung back Noelline's wily fabrications, for he began to apologise.

"You must forgive me for telling you this. I have learned since that it was not true. But it seemed just to myself that you should know. Do you understand now?"

"Yes. It was well that you should tell me. I am very sorry that your sister should have deceived you so."

“And so am I.”

Mr. Rivers said that bitterly, very bitterly. Janita could not but understand what those tones meant. But with such bitterness she could not intermeddle. No words of hers could heal it now.

So they bade each other good-bye, without any sort of demonstration or scene-making. As two friends part who respect each other to a certain extent, who have many memories in common, who have sat by the same fireside, and called the same village home, so Janita Raeburn and Gavin Rivers parted.

She did not go back again into her room, but sat there just as he had left her, for a long, long time. If there came a sad look upon her face, it might be the thought of dead friends, not of dead hopes, which brought it there. For at the close of such a tranquil day as this, Agnes Home had passed away.

Was she thinking of that death, or of the other death? Yet why should she grieve very much for the other death? Instead of one heart that called her all its own, there were thousands she could reach and comfort.

Next day Mr. and Mrs. Rivers went back to Meadowthorpe Hall, to the magnificent suite of oak-

panelled rooms and embroidered window curtains, to the Turkey carpets and family plate, and ancestral portraits, and "very valuable household effects," which, having nothing else worthy of that sacred name, they called home.

CHAPTER XXII.



POOR Gavin, poor Elene! They had wronged each other very much; no wonder that life withheld its sweetness from them. But Gavin bore the heaviest load. His wife's was one of those soft, easy, yielding natures at which grief finds no place to gnaw. There was nothing to take hold of. She was something like those round, smooth apples in which baby-children vainly strive to set their little teeth. She had no capacity for being wounded.

And, indeed, Mrs. Rivers was by no means a disappointed woman. She had married for a position, and she got what she married for. She had the most beautiful house in the neighbourhood, the richest plate, the choicest ornaments, the most expensive furniture. Meadowthorpe owned her as its leader in fashion. No bonnets were so elegant

as hers, no satins and velvets so costly as those which swept Sunday after Sunday into the Hall pew. And these things filled Elene's heart. So that on the whole she might be considered a successful woman. The experiment of life for her was not by any means a failure.

As the phrase is, she "enjoyed herself." More so perhaps, than if she had had a husband who adored her and who gathered all his sunshine from her smiles. For in that case, Elene could not have gone to sleep so comfortably after dinner for two whole hours, or spent her mornings in countless calls, and her evenings in those delightful little parties at Mrs. Narrowby's, or Mrs. Mabury's, or Miss Vere Aubrey's; those very delightful little evenings, during which all the gossip of all the village was talked over; the weddings, courtships and engagements that were pending in Gentility Square, together with little tit-bits of romance which had been wafted over from St. Olave's Cathedral Close. It was fortunate that Mr. Rivers made so little demand upon his wife for society, or companionship. And as for her husband's love, seeing that she had never possessed it, Elene was not likely to miss that.

Gavin's fault was the deepest, and he suffered more bitterly for it. Elene's married life was not one long falsehood. His was. She gave him all she had to give. He gave her nothing but his name and his position and his household goods. He had married in the haste of vexed pride. He had sacrificed everything for the sake of showing Janita that her fancied slight had not wounded him to death. Too late, he discovered that the sacrifice was needless. And that visit to London had been very humiliating. He had seen Miss Raeburn courted, flattered, caressed, bearing herself like a queen in the kingdom she had won, having lost in that winning neither grace nor womanhood. All that he had once loved her for, she possessed still; only over the girlish nature there had grown new sweetness and dignity. And but for Noelline's craftiness, and but for his own credulity, the treasure might have been his.

A man cannot have thoughts like these in his heart and present a very calm face to his companions at home. After that visit to London, Elene had good reason to say, as she did to Mrs. Colonel Gore, that Gavin was getting terribly touchy and very hard to please. Indeed she did

not know what had come over him. And they should really be obliged to have a new carpet for the dining-room. That beautiful Turkey, which was almost as good as new when she came to the Hall, was worn completely into shreds. It was so thoughtless of Gavin to wear the carpets in that way. A Turkey carpet ought to last a lifetime with proper care.

But Noelline wrote a charming letter to her sister-in-law, expatiating on the troubles of life which are occasionally permitted to visit even the most innocent, telling dear Elene that no doubt her calm sweet temperament would not suffer itself to be ruffled by these passing storms. Home peace, the Colonel's lady said, was a jewel that could not be too carefully tended. She was quite sure Elene would do all she could to preserve it. She had so rejoiced in her brother's marriage, because she felt sure that in uniting himself with dear Elene, he had secured a partner who would bear with his little inequalities of temper, and finally conquer them. Dear Elene must not be cast down.

No one could write more charming letters than Gavin's sister, more full of touching sympathy and friendliness, and so sweetly religious. It was really

quite a privilege to read them; so Miss Vere Aubrey said when Mrs. Gore wrote to her upon the death of Captain Aubrey, the uncle in India. And Noelline very wisely concluded her epistle to her sister-in-law by charging that lady on no account to mention these little difficulties to anyone out of their own family. She knew well enough that if they once travelled beyond the Hall threshold, Gentility Square would soon be in possession of them, and that would be such a nuisance, a worse nuisance by far than those numerous engagements which had prevented a call in Wimpole Street. Wise Noelline! What a treasure you were to your dear sister-in-law!

So everyone thought that Mr. and Mrs. Rivers were exceedingly happy together. Whilst the heart of the fruit was gradually rotting away, the outside was beautiful as ever, not even marred by any of those little lumps and roughnesses which are sometimes found on the surface, when within all is rich and sweet and sound. For Gavin Rivers was so very gentlemanly, and never behaved in a rude manner to anyone, least of all to his wife. And he always treated her so courteously, especially at church, and handed her the prayer-books

and found her the lessons and the collects, and opened the door for her when service was over, and was quite a pattern husband, so beautifully attentive.

At least that was what pretty Mrs. Brown, the grocer's wife, said. Mrs. Brown was one of the subordinate "fellow-Christians," and sat in the best class of painted pews, next to the green baize department. And she noticed the steward's behaviour more because Mr. Brown, though he was a very worthy little man, and had married his wife for pure love, and kept on loving her with all his heart and soul for twenty years, never used to open the pew door for her at church, or find the collects and lessons for the day in her prayer-book. And pretty Mrs. Brown did so like to see husbands attentive, particularly at church, it looked so very nice; and she was sure the whole parish might take example from Mr. Rivers, how he behaved to his wife, and how beautifully he used to put her cloak over her shoulders before she went out into the aisle. People must love each other very much when they would take all that trouble. *She* knew somebody who had never offered to put *his* wife's cloak on for her all the twenty years that they had

been married, and never thought of such a thing as finding her places in the prayer-book.

All this Mrs. Brown said one Sunday as she and her husband were enjoying their nicely-cooked dinner in the back parlour behind the shop. And little Mr. Brown, being a quiet, peace-loving man, did not say much about it just then. But one day, not long afterwards, he did venture to ask his wife how she would like him always to call her "Mrs. Brown" in the cold, formal way that the steward spoke to Mrs. Rivers. And poor, pretty Mrs. Brown said she shouldn't care about it at all. Indeed she would rather like Mr. Brown to try it. Because it was very ungentleel for married people to call each other by their Christian names. She had heard that Mrs. Mabury never did so to her husband, nor Mrs. Narrowby either. And she was sure she had often felt quite ashamed when Mr. Brown had shouted across the counter into the back parlour, "Polly, Polly honey," so loud that half the parish might hear it. Oh! yes, she would be called "Mrs. Brown" willingly enough, if only Mr. Brown would behave to her in other ways as the steward behaved to his wife.

Poor little woman! But the grocer was a sen-

sible man, one who knew more than he told. And he kept on calling Mrs. Brown "Polly, honey," as heretofore.

By and by, more than six months after that visit to London, when November fogs had begun to gather, and the black leaves to rot under the Meadowthorpe lane elm trees, Gentility Square heard a rumour that the Hall carriage had been seen standing for more than half an hour at the door of one of the most fashionable infant millinery establishments in St. Olave's. If that rumour was correct, something very important must be near at hand. And then the ladies' maid, who had a cousin married to a nephew of Barnie Wilson's, told wonderful stories about little white cashmere cloaks lined with blue silk, being sent up for inspection to my lady's boudoir, "the beautifullest little cloaks that ever were seen," some of them braided all over with white and edged with swan's down, just like my lady's own opera mantle that she wore when she went to the great parties at St. Olave's. And after that, embroidered robes were brought on to be looked at, robes that you might have blown away almost, they were so fine and gossamer-like, and caps—oh, such little loves of

caps, with white rosettes and borders of the finest Valenciennes lace that could be had for money. And Mrs. Mabury was quite sure of this, that she had seen Mrs. Rivers stop a nurse on the St. Olave's road, a nurse who was carrying a baby in her arms. And Mrs. Rivers lifted the veil from the baby's face and kissed its little rosy forehead. That was conclusive.

So perhaps, after all, sunshine was coming to that stately home, where for so long, heartless ceremony had usurped the place of affection. Perhaps, when baby fingers began to twine round those jewelled hands, and baby eyes searched hers, asking love for love, Elene would wake to a new life. That husk of apathy and selfishness might fall off, leaving room for the soul to grow. For many a frivolous fine lady of fashion has been roused to womanhood by the kiss of her child. Elene might too.

And Gavin; surely that frown would smooth out from his forehead when merry little footsteps began to patter about the once silent house. He could not bend such a cold, stern look over the face that would soon be held up to him for a father's kiss. A child's laugh would bring back the glad-

ness that had been away so long. And little hands holding father's and mother's in their tiny clasp, would join them again faster than they had ever been before. Surely they should dwell in peace together, and a little child should lead them.

So a few more weeks passed on, until the new year came in, and February snowdrops began to whiten the churchyard graves, and the lilac trees, putting out thousands of green buds, whispered of a new life that was coming to the world; and the robins, chirping in sunny noontide, said that Spring was at hand. Spring, when gloom and sorrow pass away and all things are glad.

And it was on one of the brightest of these February days, when the birds were singing their loudest, and the snowdrops blooming thickliest on the churchyard graves, that the Meadowthorpe bells set up a merry peal, and it was whispered about from house to house that a son and heir had been born to the new steward.

"The beautifullest little boy that was ever seen, it was," said the fat old nurse, as she wrapped up the unconscious bit of humanity in silken-fine linen and enveloped its little turnip of a head in a rosetted cap, bordered with the costliest Valen-

ciennes that could be had for love or money. "Yes, it *was* the beautifullest little boy that ever was seen. And it's the very picture of its lovely mamma, it is. And it shall have a fine christening, it shall then, the pretty darling, and its best muslin robe on, bless it!"

And good Mrs. Peterkin's expansive palm tingled in imagination with the chink of sponsorial sovereigns and half-crowns that were to come before long.

That was in the bright February morning, when the bells were ringing and the birds singing for very gladness in Meadowthorpe churchyard, and the snowdrops trembling whitely over all the graves. Three days later, the birds were singing merrily as ever, but there was no merry chime to answer them. Instead, the great bell of St. Olave's cathedral, tolling slowly at intervals through the day, pronounced that death had been doing its work amongst some of the Close people.

And the Hall blinds were drawn down, and the servants stepped noiselessly about, and there was great silence in the room where Mrs. Rivers, with her beautiful baby boy in her arms, lay cold and still enough beneath the crimson canopy. And

Gentility Square was sighing its loudest, and putting its cambric handkerchief to its eyes, and saying—

“Oh, how shocking! What a terrible affliction! Poor Mr. Rivers!”

CHAPTER XXIII.



FOR one long silent week the Hall blinds were drawn down, and the servants stepped about sadly, and Gavin Rivers sat in that oak-panelled dining-room amongst his family portraits and hereditary bronzes, no lay figure vexing him with its dropped eyelids and nerveless white hands. Quite other than that vexing him now.

Then the marble slab that closed the Hall vault at the south end of Meadowthorpe church was taken up, and amidst much beautiful chanting of funeral hymns, the black velvet covered coffin was lowered to its last resting-place. And as the bell tolled, and the long procession of draped steeds and sombre carriages filed slowly back to the Hall, Gentility Square put its handkerchief to its eyes again, and said—

“Oh ! how very sad !”

But this time it said a little more, and wondered who would be Mrs. Rivers, number two.

For, of course, the steward of Meadowthorpe would marry again. It was always best for men to marry again. Widowers were such very helpless beings, no wonder they married again very soon. And that sweet-looking Mrs. Grey, who lost her husband in the Kaffir war, Mrs. Grey who had just cast her weeds, and begun to go out to little parties in a very quiet way—thought that most likely Mr. Rivers would turn his attention to a widow. A widow would be so very suitable for him. And Miss Seton, of the Aspens, a pretty flirt, not long out of school frocks and French exercises, said that widowers often married people very much younger than themselves for second wives. And then the Misses Vere Aubrey began to consider, separately, how the name of Rivers would look on their visiting cards, and those magic words, “The Hall,” instead of “Aubrey House,” in the corner. Both the Misses Vere Aubrey thought that would look very nice. So did the diamond-shaped Miss Narrowby, who told her mamma that she thought the most sensible thing the new steward could do

now, would be to fix his affections on some practical person, steady and well-conducted, who would make herself generally useful in the parish. The former Mrs. Rivers, though very elegant and lady-like, did not make herself generally useful in the parish, as the steward's wife ought to do. And the rector's lady made up her mind that she would ask her sister, Emily Graham, over to Meadowthorpe in a few weeks' time, say, perhaps, three months, when Mr. Rivers might be supposed to have struggled out of the deepest grief of his bereavement. Mrs. Mabury did not think that her sister would seriously object to a widower, especially when the home and position were so desirable.

All Gentility Square went to church next Sunday, when it was expected that the distracted husband would make his first appearance in public. For, of course, everyone was anxious to know how he would conduct himself; whether he would be deeply affected or mildly subdued; whether he would proudly conceal his grief under an outward show of calmness, or whether, when—as was the custom after any important death—the organist began to play the Dead March in Saul, Mr. Rivers would bury his face in a white pocket-

handkerchief, and give himself up to unrestrained emotion.

Besides, Mrs. Colonel Gore would be there, in her new London mourning. Mrs. Gore had such exquisite taste in mourning, and looked so very sweet in it. It was really something wonderful, the way in which those fair cheeks and golden curls of hers became a crape bonnet. Mrs. Gore would certainly be present in the Hall pew. She had come down from town as soon as the death took place. So kind of her, Miss Vere Aubrey said; she must be such a comfort to her poor brother in his affliction. For she was so tenderly sympathising, and used to write such lovely letters to people in distress. Miss Vere Aubrey could never forget the inexpressible consolation she had received in a note from Mrs. Gore when poor Uncle Aubrey died in India. No doubt she would say everything that could be needed at the Hall. Dear Mrs. Gore!

The people were not disappointed. Mrs. Colonel Gore *did* make her appearance at church next Sunday, in a perfect love of a crape bonnet, with a beautiful little design of black braid all over it, and a crape veil, embroidered with willow sprays of

floss silk, as "sweetly pretty" as her religion. The Colonel was there, too, looking gravely dignified, as became the occasion, and there was a great array of tasselled epaulettes and gloves and hatbands in the servants' pew. No expense had been spared in putting the domestics into mourning for the lady of Meadowthorpe Hall.

But no Mr. Rivers. At which the people marvelled very much, but decided, at last, that it was fashionable now for the widower not to make his appearance with the rest of the family. A new style of mourning, down from London, like Mrs. Colonel Gore's bonnet.

Poor Gavin Rivers! For, though he did not go to church that first Sunday, and pour his affliction into a cambric handkerchief whilst the organist played the "Dead March," he did mourn very bitterly. There is no grief like that with which we remember coldness and unkindness when it is too late to blot out their memory. Death transfigures even the commonest into something which we ought to have loved. Faces into which we looked with coldness before, become sadly beautiful when the grave has hidden them for ever from our sight. It seems so cruel, then, to have

brought tears to the eyes which can no longer look reproachfully at us, or to have caused other than a smile upon the lips which are so fast closed now in the deep, patient repose of death. It is only their goodness we remember, when marble headstone and daisied sod have shut away the dead from our sight.

Gavin Rivers, sitting there in his lonely home, thought no more of Elene's apathy, of the frivolity and graceful selfishness which had once galled him so. She was his wife. He had promised to love her, and he had not kept that promise. His married life had been one long falsehood. He had lied to the world and himself and her. He had lost his self-respect, and that loss stings deeply. His was the grief of a great heart which has been untrue to itself, false with a falseness which may be repented of, but can never be atoned for.

Then, like frost upon an unhealed wound, came the condolences of the Meadowthorpe people. They praised the dead. She was so gentle, so amiable. She must have been such a sweet companion. No harshness, no impatience, no asperity, but ever that tranquil smile, brightening and blessing his home. And they were so happy together. She

was so proud of her husband. His loss was very great. He must be very lonely now.

To all which well-meant condolences Gavin Rivers listened with steady endurance, only manifesting sometimes by a quiver of his proud face that which no self-control could keep entirely back. Gentility Square noticed these manifestations of emotion, and said to itself,

“See how he loved her.”

Gavin could not bear it. His life was a lie still. Every word that was spoken to him, every look that he met, stung him to the quick. That he had acted his part so well, that he had preserved their home from gossip, and her name from pity, gave him no comfort. He lived in an atmosphere of falsehood, scorned by himself, respected by everyone else. Such a life for a man like the new steward of Meadowthorpe could not last long.

Weeks passed on, a month, two months, three months, nearly four months. The little baby's clothes had all been taken away, the silken hoods and cashmere cloaks and lace-bordered caps; the cot, too, with its satin lining and downy blankets. And all poor Elene's things were put out of sight; her jewels sent away to the Deanery, her dinner

and evening costumes shut up in wardrobes whose locks were never turned. Nothing was left in the house that could remind anyone of her.

"Folks shows their grief different," said the housekeeper, after receiving orders about her lady's personal effects. "I know some men as wouldn't have a thing moved after them they belonged to was dead. My last master was in that way. When missis died, he had a knife and fork set for her every day, just same as when she was alive, and her easy-chair set up again the fireside, and all her bits of things lying about as she had left them afore she was took for death. And you might have heard him sobbing all over the house for ever so long after the funeral. He was cut up, he was, was my last master. But he got married again before the twelvemonth was out, and I don't blame him. Widowers is helpless things. I wouldn't say Mr. Rivers don't feel the missis's death for all he's so still about it. Maybe he frets o' nights. Some folks does, and keeps a clear face for day time."

However that might be, time wore on. Mrs. Mabury thought she might venture to ask her sister out to the Rectory for a few weeks. Emily Graham

came. And Mrs. Narrowby began to talk of asking "poor Mr. Rivers" to come in some evening in a very quiet way, it must be so very lonely for him up there at the Hall, especially towards night. Next time she saw him in the village she would say how glad they should be to see him any evening, if he would just come in and spend an hour or two with them, not to meet anyone, of course, but their own family—just their own family.

Mrs. Narrowby did see the steward and told him this. But he never came. And though Mrs. Ma-bury asked him more than once to the Rectory, he never went there either, nor to Dr. Maguire's, nor to Mrs. Seton of the Aspens, nor, indeed, to any of his old friends, all of whom would have been so glad to show him a little attention, and help to comfort him in his great loneliness. And, instead of growing cheery and sociable, as widowers are expected to grow, when the first sharp edge of their sorrow is worn off, Mr. Rivers became more and more gloomy, shut himself out from society, was never seen in public except at church, used to spend his evenings in walking up and down the dyke-side past old Ben Royland's garden, took no interest in anything or anybody; in short,

mourned—so everybody said—as no one has a right to mourn who believes in a disposing Providence and a joyful resurrection.

At last, about five months after the death of his wife, the steward set off for London, telling Mr. Andrews, the clerk of the works, that he should be absent for a few days on business connected with the Duke's property. He staid in town a week. He might pass the door of the old house in Wimpole Street during that time. If so, he never went in. Two or three times he saw lights flickering in the little study that opened out of the drawing-room; once he loitered in the shadow of a portico to watch Janita Raeburn, in white dress and coronet of shining leaves, step into the carriage which was waiting to take her to some great gathering. But she did not see him, and he did not speak to her.

At the end of the week he came back to Meadowthorpe Hall. The rich old bronzes were wrapped in woollen cloth, the family plate was sent to the bank at St. Olave's. The curtains, carpets, and draperies were folded up, the servants put upon board wages, and, to the consternation and indignation of Gentility Square, who thought that five

months was long enough to mourn for the best wife that ever lived, Gavin Rivers announced that he was going abroad.

No one knew for how long. Mr. Andrews was appointed temporary steward during his absence. "Very uncertain," was the only answer that could be got out of the clerk of the works when questioned as to the probable length of time that the Hall would remain unoccupied. Mr. Rivers might be away two or three years, or he might return at any time. His movements were quite uncertain.

Then they tried the old housekeeper, who was left in charge of the furniture, but with no better success.

"Master's always done things by fits and starts," she said, "since the Missis was took, and indeed for a good bit afore. There's never been no saying this long while past what time he'd have dinner, or do things that used to be as reg'lar as clock-work when the young lady was at home. He'll come back when he's a mind to. I lay that's most anybody can tell about him."

Everyone said it was very strange. They did not think the new steward was a man who would have allowed himself to be so overcome by grief as to

neglect the duties of his position. Respect for a wife's memory was a very proper thing, but it might be carried too far, and it certainly was carried too far when it took a man away from his home and his business, and the management of his affairs.

Also, the good people might have said that regard for a wife's memory was carried too far when it prevented her husband from selecting a successor to the vacant place. But of course people did not say that. They only thought it.

A few evil-disposed persons went still further, and hinted at pecuniary difficulties as the real cause of the new steward's sudden determination. Mrs. Macturk in particular had always had her own private opinions about the change in Mr. Rivers' appearance of late years. People never looked so gloomy and morose as the master of Meadowthorpe Hall unless something was seriously amiss. Mrs. Macturk hoped the accounts would be found correct at the next half-yearly balancing. She quite hoped they would, but if not—and then Mrs. Macturk *looked*, but said nothing. The new steward had taken to racing and hunting since his marriage, things which he had never been known to indulge in before. Perhaps, also, he might have a taste for

the turf, which, as everyone knows, is a very expensive taste. At any rate, there was room for suspicion. Mrs. Narrowby did not think Mr. Rivers would return to the Dykeland estate at all, as its steward.

But little Mr. Brown came as near the truth as anyone, though he never mentioned it, even to "Polly." For little Mr. Brown thought that no grief is so bitter as the grief which comes too late, no wounds so hard to bear as those into which the balm of forgiveness can never be poured. Mr. Brown was a sensible little man, if not so assiduous in his public attentions as some husbands that Mrs. B. could name.

Gavin Rivers went to Rio, to manage business affairs for the Duke, who had large property there. The Duke had long been wishing for some skilled and confidential person to take charge of his foreign estates. Gavin Rivers was the very man. If he only managed Esperita as he had managed Meadowthorpe, the Duke might say his prayers and be thankful.

Perhaps, also, Gavin went away to blot out the memory of the past; that in future years, a sadder and a wiser man, he might come home and begin a

new life. A life wherein he could be true to himself ; a life which, though it might and must be, always gloomed by the thought of wrong deeds, need not any more be ruined by them.

CHAPTER XXIV.



THE first thing Mr. Rivers did when he reached Brazil was to inquire after Roy. The gentleman in whose employ he went out had left Rio two or three years ago. That expedition into the interior of the country had ended disastrously. The men had been attacked by a party of natives. Some had been murdered, others taken prisoners. Roy was amongst the missing. His comrades could not tell what had become of him. Anxious to secure their own safety, and knowing that resistance was useless, they had made their escape, after seeing one or two of their companions struck down. When they reached a place of shelter, they found that others were missing besides those whom they had seen murdered. Roy was one. It was no use making inquiries. Casualties of that kind were

of frequent occurrence in the colony. If the friends of the murdered or captured man made no stir about it, the affair blew over. And Roy being a stranger and a foreigner, no one thought it needful to make any stir about him. He might not be dead. He might be a prisoner in some of the native settlements. If he would teach them English arts and customs, they would treat him kindly. But it would be no use inquiring after him. So long a time had elapsed now since his disappearance, that any little interest which the event once excited had quite died out.

That was not enough for Gavin Rivers. He made application to the government, and obtained a promise that the case should be searched into, and a party of soldiers sent out to demand Roy's release, or to ascertain if he were really dead. And Gavin gave neither himself nor the officials any rest until a detachment of military was under marching orders, with instructions not to return without some definite intelligence of the young man. That was the commencement of the new steward's career in South America.

And so poor little Meadowthorpe was once more left to its own devices. The tide of life, ebbing

out from it, carried away first one and then another of those who had hoped and suffered and endured there. Meadowthorpe was very dull when the Hall was empty, just like London when the Royal Family is absent. For the Hall was to Meadowthorpe what the Court is to London. There were always quiet little gaieties afloat when the steward was at home,—balls, suppers, quadrille parties and other entertainments, which kept the place from complete stagnation. The Hall family gave a tone to the village, bringing it quite to a level with St. Olave's in a social point of view. For the steward's lady always had the latest London fashions, and knew what was the newest style for dinner parties, and that sort of thing; and the steward took the town papers, and brought down parliamentary news, and often had members of the House staying with him. So that Meadowthorpe, when the Hall was occupied, was, as Mrs. Narrowby said, quite a privileged place, uniting the retirement of rural life with all the advantages of a residence in town.

Therefore Gentility Square was much disappointed when Mr. Rivers announced his intention of going abroad for an indefinite period. They

had looked forward to his marrying at the end of the twelvemonth, if not a lady from their own select midst, at least a lady from somewhere. Then there would have been a second round of wedding festivities. The Square and the Close might possibly—so Mrs. Mabury thought, with reference to her sister Emily—have shaken hands again. There would have been a general holiday and merry-making and ringing of bells and scattering of flowers. Instead of all that, Meadowthorpe was quiet as the grave, the Hall shut up, empty, deserted, the great square pew at church despoiled of its cushions and velvet-bound prayer-books, the village itself like a family of orphan children, without head or support. It was very disappointing.

After he went abroad, no one heard anything of the steward except in his official capacity. Mr. Andrews had letters from him sometimes, but they were purely business communications, relative to improvements which were taking place on the estate, the disposal of farms, or the letting of cottages. Never any news of himself, never any inquiries concerning the social interests of the place, the fortunes or misfortunes of the people amongst whom he had lived for nearly six years. Once,

indeed, he mentioned Miss Alwyne, and inquired whether she had had any of her literary friends visiting at Meadowthorpe lately. To which Mr. Andrews replied that Miss Raeburn had been staying for a few weeks at the Cottage, and in consequence of her visit many parties had been given both in the village and at St. Olave's.

No more inquiries after that. No messages or compliments to any of his old friends, though Mrs. Narrowby had been so very cordial to him after his sad loss, and had begged him to go in whenever he felt disposed; both she and Mr. Narrowby would be so delighted to see him, and would do anything in the world to cheer his loneliness. Mrs. Narrowby thought such behaviour was very ungrateful. The least he could have done was to send his kind regards now and then, just to show that he had not quite forgotten them after all the kindness and attention which had been shown him. And never even to ask about poor old Mr. and Mrs. Royland, although he had been the means of luring away that only boy of theirs to an untimely death. Everyone knew that if it had not been for the representations of Mr. Rivers, young Royland would never have gone abroad as he did. If the

steward had saved poor Roy's life in one way, he had sacrificed it in another, and he ought to feel himself bound to show every kindness to the parents whose home he had blighted. But some people were so hard. Some people never seemed to know what was required of them.

Dear Mrs. Colonel Gore would not have done so. Mrs. Gore never forgot when she wrote to her poor sister-in-law, to inquire after those kind, good people at Meadowthorpe, because, she said, they had been so very attentive to her, and Mrs. Narrowby, especially, had received her like a mother. If Mrs. Gore had travelled to the world's end, she would have remembered Meadowthorpe, though she had only lived in the place six months, instead of as many years. But then the steward's sister was so susceptible of kindness. She had such a tender nature.

Poor Mrs. Narrowby ! And that very evening, beneath the chandeliers of a London drawing-room, Mrs. Colonel Gore was chatting with Major Hallet, who, when his regiment was quartered in the St. Olave's barracks six years ago, used to come out sometimes to Meadowthorpe for a day's shooting with the steward, or to make up a quadrille

with some of the Close young ladies. And as Noeline flirted with her ivory fan, she asked the Major if he remembered those quadrille parties, or ever thought about the pleasant old times at Meadowthorpe Hall.

“A wretched little place, the village. Now, don't you think it was a most wretched little place? And the people so stupid too. Oh, dear! How Tip and I used to laugh at those poor, benighted Meadowthorpe people. I have often wondered since, how I managed to get through six months amongst them. I couldn't do it now for the world. Poor Gavin was literally bored to death there before he went abroad. Oh, I used to pity him so. You don't know how I used to pity him. But the country was always my aversion. Country people are invariably a nuisance.”

That was what Noeline said to Major Hallet, as, with many a sweet smile and playful gesture she flirted her ivory fan beneath the chandeliers of a London drawing-room. That was not at all what she said to Mrs. Narrowby when she came down to poor dear Elene's funeral, with a cambric handkerchief to her face, and tears in those sweet brown eyes. For then it gave her such a sad

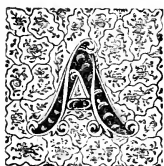
pleasure to come back again to dear little Meadowthorpe. She had so many memories connected with dear little Meadowthorpe. It would always have a home in her heart, for she had received so much kindness from the people there. She did not think she had ever received so much kindness in her life before as those dear people in Gentility Square pressed upon her. They were so very good. She felt as if it was quite naughty of her not to have stayed longer amongst them, and tried to have made some return for all the attention they had paid her. She could never forget kindness. It was not in her nature to forget kindness.

And Mrs. Narrowby, to whom she said all this, believed her. It was so like Mrs. Colonel Gore to say it. Mrs. Colonel Gore was such an affectionate creature. If only her brother had half so much tenderness and sweetness.

But, as Abigail Snarey once said in Miss Hepzibah's kitchen—

“Some folks is bad, and some folks isn't.”

CHAPTER XXV.



AND now it is time to come back to the old house in Wimpole Street, where Janita Raeburn was toiling hard to maintain the position she had already won ; toiling with head and heart and hand, in that very labour finding rest. And if, through all these busy activities, there strayed sometimes a thought of the old past time with its simple pleasures, its dream castles quite fallen now, still there was enough of duty in her life to keep it from weariness ; and over all, the quiet consciousness that she was in her right place, doing her right work. Which consciousness may make any life content.

Bessie Ashton remained with her young mistress. She never spoke of Roy now, and by that great silence Janita knew how fondly and faith-

fully she held his memory in her heart. She had quite given up the hope of seeing him again until they should clasp hands for ever in that world where there is no more sea. That hope was enough.

Now that the wearing suspense of those first terrible months had passed, now that she knew the worst, and had made up her mind to it, some of Bessie's former cheerfulness returned. Not the up-springing joyousness of the old Meadowthorpe days; *that* had gone away for ever. She would never again be the blithe, merry-hearted girl, singing over her work or flushing into bright smiles when Roy's low, clear whistle was heard away down the village. But the colour came back to her cheek and the light to her eyes, and there was a clear, steadfast smile upon her face like evening sunshine when storms are overpast. If she had ceased to hope, she had also ceased to murmur.

Bessie did not stay at the old house in Wimpole Street because no one asked her to leave it. Over and over again she had had opportunities of "settling in life," as it is called. Sir Harry Montellan's pompous, fussy old butler would fain

have given into her keeping the heart which beat under his expansive red plush waistcoat, and gathered all her beauty and sweetness within the shelter of his sturdy arm. Mr. Mumps, the young man who served Dr. Home's family with bread and biscuits, had some thoughts of taking unto himself a wife, and who so suitable as Bessie Ashton? Besides, if he got a wife, he intended to open a small business in the penny-pie line, and a face like Bessie's behind the counter would secure a thriving trade in no time. So Mr. Mumps laid his prospects at Bessie's feet for her consideration. And Madame D'Eseglio's footman had been down on his knees half a dozen times in Dr. Home's kitchen, beseeching Bessie to marry him and live ladies' maid with the mistress. It was worth something to live ladies' maid with Madame D'Eseglio, for she never wore a muslin dress twice, and turned over her silks and satins to the waiting woman before they had seen six weeks of service. Bessie might do worse, the footman said, than go into Madame D'Eseglio's service, even setting aside all that *he* could become to her.

But Bessie sent away suitor after suitor with a sad heart and a rueful countenance. She had her own

plans for the future. She meant to stay where she was until she had saved a little sum of money. Then she would go back to Meadowthorpe, rent the end cottage in that row by the mill-slip, and get a living by taking in dressmaking. There, as she looked up from her work, she might see the shelves which Roy had made, and the doors he had measured, and the panels he had smoothed; and perhaps old Ben would let her have those candlesticks which he had turned out of the piece of South American wood. At any rate, she might have them when the old people died. And there in the rooms where she and Roy were to have been so happy, she would live a quiet, lonely life, waiting until the end came, and nothing parted them any more.

It was not a brilliant prospect. Not half so brilliant as dressing Madame D'Eseglio's hair, and wearing Madame D'Eseglio's cast-off silks and satins; or selling penny pies behind Mr. Mump's counter, and walking arm-in-arm in the parks with him on a Sunday afternoon. Not half so brilliant, either, as sitting in the Montellan pew, side by side with the fat old butler, who would buy her a new bonnet every season, and flounced dresses as many as ever she pleased. But Bessie did not care about

flounced dresses so much as she used to do. There was only one dress now that she prized very dearly, that she often unfolded and folded up again, smoothing it out with such tender care as mothers may spend over little frocks that dead children have worn. And that was a lilac muslin, rather old-fashioned and out of date, out of date at least for London, where not even ladies'-maids can wear a last year's dress for fear of being laughed at. Not a brilliant future then, but it was the future Bessie had chosen for herself, and she was content with it.

And so the months kept slowly stealing on; Elene Rivers lying with her little baby in her arms under the marble slab at the south end of Meadowthorpe church; Gavin away beyond the seas, toiling hard in the Duke's service, taking wearisome journeys up and down the country, drawing out long statements and estimates and balance-sheets, for the Esperita property was in a sadly embrangled state. Striving hard, too, all the while to root out old regrets and old bitternesses. Janita Raeburn, also striving hard, not to root out old regrets and bitternesses—for these were long since passed away—but to plant the sweet flowers of hope and peace; not for herself

only, but for those who, coming after her, should be cheered by their beauty, and perhaps find healing in their balm. Bessie, gradually settling down into a quiet, thoughtful woman, not the sort of woman that men flatter and compliment, but one to be treasured and trusted, one who might even yet find sunshine in her life.

Spring came; London began to be very gay. The trees in the parks put out little green buds here and there; the flower-girls thrust lilies of the valley in people's faces as they walked down Piccadilly and Park Lane. Fresh, white, fragrant lilies of the valley, just like those which bloomed on the warm side of Meadowthorpe Hall, under the windows of the great dining-room, into which six years ago, that little beam of sunlight stealing, found out so many things.

Mrs. Home was in Scotland. She had gone to visit Willie and his wife at the manse of Strathellet. Willie was quite a family man now. Three juvenile Homes were tumbling about in the manse nursery. Round, dumpy, good-tempered little bits of mortality they were, with fat faces and red cheeks and very big blue eyes, and flaxen hair which their mamma, with infinite pains and patience, used to

curl up every night before she kissed and laid them in their cots. Willie was very fortunate in his wife ; such a capital housewife as she was, and *such* a cook—oh, such a very good cook ! Willie never tasted such pies and cakes anywhere as Gracie used to make for him. Indeed, when the children were properly attended to, and the tapes and buttons set on, there was nothing Gracie liked half so well as reading cookery-books and trying fresh receipts to find out how they tasted. She did not care about fancy work, or poetry, or conversation, or anything of that sort, but she liked to make puddings, and to see the children's hair nicely curled. A capital wife Gracie Home proved ; Willie might have sought far and wide before he found such another.

Sometimes, in an afternoon, when Mrs. William was taking her daily nap—for she had no notion that people ought to wait until they are past forty before they go to sleep in an afternoon—Mrs. Home would go into her boy's study, and have a little quiet chat with him about old days. And then they would talk of Janita, and his mother would tell him, not without a certain half-motherly pride, what a famous woman their little Nyta had

become, what grand parties she used to go to, and what great houses she visited, and what noble people came in their carriages to call upon her !

“You know, Willie,” good, gentle Mrs. Home once said, “I did think long ago you would maybe wed the wee bit lassie yourself. And I would have been glad, too, for I love her well. But things are better as they are. She would have been no the wife for you, Willie, I’m just thinking. She’s altogether a noble woman, and of an excellent spirit. And yet——”

There the sentence ended. Mrs. Home’s thoughts went back to that still June evening when Agnes died, first thanking her foster-sister for light that had guided her home. And Willie, now a fat, well-favoured man of two-and-thirty, leaned back in his study chair, and as he snuffed the fragrant smell of tea-cakes which were being prepared below, and as he thought of the excellent dinner his wife had cooked for him that day, and of the three fat little roundabouts that were tumbling over each other in the nursery upstairs, he told his mother that she was quite right, that things were much better so. He always liked Janita. He always should like her. But she was not the wife for him.

Willie was quite right. Things were better so, much better so.

Mrs. Home had been in Scotland nearly two months, when the postman brought a letter to the old house in Wimpole Street. She was coming back that evening, and some one must meet the seven o'clock train from the north. So, as the March twilight began to fall, and lamps to glimmer in long lines down the London streets, Bessie Ashton put on her shepherd's-plaid shawl and went to the King's Cross station.

It was the twenty-second of March. Six years ago that day, she had put on that same shepherd's-plaid shawl and gone down the haling-bank road to St. Olave's, passing old Ben's garden-gate, where Roy was waiting for her. Roy, dead now, struck down by cruel hands in the far-off country. And standing there beneath the old willow-tree, larks carolling far up in the blue sky, tender little wheat blades springing all over the brown fields, bright-eyed robins peering at them from the budding hedges, she and Roy had promised to love one another always. A promise she had kept faithfully, and would keep it to the end.

Then she remembered the walk to St. Olave's;

how they went to her sister's house near the gaol —Bessie had no sad thoughts as she passed the gaol then, only a half-childish sort of fear—and after tea, whilst Mr. Hastings and Roy talked about the new steward who had just come to Meadowthorpe, she got her sister upstairs into the spare bedroom, and sitting with their arms round each other's waists, Bessie told her all about it. Oh! what a long time it took to tell all about it. How many pauses there were for smiles and tears, or for good, wise, matronly little bits of advice from Mrs. Hastings, who knew as well as any woman in the world how to manage a husband and keep him in good order! And how, through all these good little bits of advice, Bessie kept listening for the sound of Roy's voice down in the back parlour—Roy, whose wife she was going to be. Not just yet though, as she told her sister; for times had been rather bad lately with the old people, and Roy's wages were scarcely enough to set up housekeeping on his own account, and Mrs. Royland's illness had run away with nearly all their ready money. Not just yet, then.

“Not just yet.” And Bessie sighed so deeply

that a fast-looking young man who was passing, stared rudely in her face and said—

“What’s up, pretty miss?”

But Bessie never heard him. Her thoughts were all in the sweet past. Then she remembered the walk back to Meadowthorpe, arm-in-arm with Roy. That long starlight walk, when she had scarcely dared to speak to him, he seemed so far above her, so good, so true, so patient. And she was so vain, so full of girlish folly. But she would be different now. She would love him very much. She would never grieve him any more, never vex him by her idle flirting ways. As they came along the St. Olave’s road to Meadowthorpe that night, Bessie felt as if nothing she could ever do, nothing that she could ever be, was good enough for Roy. And when they had got home after that first kiss of his at Miss Hepzibah’s door, she had run away upstairs into her own room to think about it all and cry a little, just a very little ; not for grief though. After that, she had knelt down and said her prayers, asking God to bless Roy and make them both very happy. Which prayer the good God had not answered.

Turning over all these old memories, Bessie

threaded her way along the crowded streets, quite dark now, except for glittering lines of lamps, to the King's Cross station, where she took her place behind the railings to wait for Mrs. Home.

The train came in. There was always a great commotion when that north train came in. Such striding to and fro of tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested Highlanders; such calling out in rich Scottish accents to porters and hotel waiters; such marshalling of piles of luggage; such shouts after missing portmanteaus; such hissing and whistling and screaming before the train, like a great black serpent, had writhed back again into the gloom. Poor little Mrs. Home was almost overwhelmed in the general confusion. Bessie called a cab, saw her and her trunks safely deposited in it, and then having nothing particular to do, she went round to the opposite platform and amused herself by watching the travellers who were preparing to depart by the down train.

Those of you, consistent mistresses and female heads of families, who have already been severe upon Bessie Ashton because of her weakness for penny edging and steel brooches, may possibly renew your censures on the present occasion.

You may say that it was a very improper thing for her to be loitering in the King's Cross station at that time of night, and alone too. She ought to have gone home immediately, with hands demurely folded under her shawl, and eyes that looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, lest they should behold vanity. At least, that is what you would have expected from your ladies' maid. That is what any respectable, well-conducted domestic of steady principles, Abigail Snarey for instance, would have done. Bessie ought to have done it too. You would have lectured her well if she had not done it. And at the close of the lecture you would have felt that glow of satisfied pride which the consciousness of duty well performed never fails to bring.

But though you may blame Bessie, I do not, for standing a quarter of an hour at the door of the second-class ladies' waiting room. It was pleasant, after many long quiet days in that gloomy old Wimpole Street house, to get a little nearer to the great tide of life, to watch its curling, fantastic spray, to listen to the noise of its waves as they broke and rolled away back again. That was all Bessie stayed for, just to be roused and freshened ;

not to put herself in the way of temptation, as the female heads would say, not to be stared at or admired, as the people used to admire her when she had put on her second best bonnet and walked down Meadowthorpe village six years ago. No; all that sort of thing had quite passed away for Bessie Ashton now.

She amused herself for some time by watching the little groups of people on the platform, fidgetty old ladies keeping guard over piles of small parcels and sheaves of umbrellas, commercial travellers with sample cases swinging from their many pocketed coats, here and there a sturdy Scotchman, whose steady step and upright mien reminded her strangely of some one at whose side she had often walked, some one who was lying far away now beneath a tropic sky, unwatched, unburied, forgotten almost by everyone save herself.

The station clock struck eight. It was time for Bessie to think about going home. She was just coming down the steps that led from the second class waiting room door, when some one in a great rough travelling cape came up to the porter, who was sticking labels on some luggage for Edinburgh.

"When does the St. Olave's train start?"

"Ten minutes' time, sir."

The stranger turned away. Bessie watched him as he walked up and down the platform, a little apart from the other people, the lamp-light streaming upon his light hair and beard, and the face which was uplifted proudly as ever.

Little pleasures ruffle us into laughter, but a great holy joy sinks far down and lies quietly in the heart before it blossoms out into beautiful smiles and tears. Bessie, standing there at the waiting room door, listening to that firm tread, watching the light stream down upon that lifted head, neither started nor screamed. She did not rush forward, upsetting passengers and porters in her frantic haste. Very quietly, quietly as half an hour before she had met Mrs. Home, she went up to this stranger and put her hand into his.

"Roy."

"Bessie."

That was all. Nothing more than that. Except indeed the long searching look, in which each read the other's love and faithfulness.

"Let us go home, Roy."

They went out into the brightly lighted streets, where people were thronging backwards and forwards, where drunken men with red eyes and bloated faces were staggering out of gin palaces, where beggar children in white pinafores were sitting meekly by the roadside, where ballad-sellers and newsmongers were shouting the latest varieties in their respective wares, where carriages full of ladies in ball-room costume were flashing past, and crowded omnibuses busily tracking their accustomed round. Hand in hand through all the bustle Roy and Bessie went, speaking never a word. They were together, they would never part any more now. That was enough. Only Bessie kept saying to herself—

“ Roy has come back. Roy loves me. Roy is not dead.”

Sometimes she could scarcely believe it. It must be a dream, just a sweet dream, from which she should be roused again, as she had so often been roused before, by the grey morning dawn and the monotonous tones of the street criers. Then she would move her hand a little farther into Roy's, and by the strong, warm clasp that closed over it, she knew that the dream was true, that no waking

would send it away, that Roy had indeed come back and was all her own now.

So on through the crowded streets, until they came to the old house, with its lion-headed brass knocker and tall narrow windows. Bessie took Roy straight up into the drawing-room where Janita sat reading.

“ Please, Miss Jane, Roy’s come back.”

Janita shook hands with him. If she gave him no other welcome, it was only because she could not speak. Then she did the kindest thing which, under the circumstances, could have been done ; she went out and left them there together.

CHAPTER XXVI.



H, that dear quiet time in Janita Raeburn's room, just Roy and Bessie side by side, after their long, long years of parting. Quite on to the end of her life Bessie remembered that time, never without thanking God for it. Oh, the rest and the peace, and the stillness!

Nay, not the stillness. For sometimes Bessie laughed, and sometimes she sobbed, and sometimes the quick tears kept dropping upon Roy's arm, where her head rested as she knelt beside him.

Bessie Ashton was only an ordinary woman after all. Joy and sorrow, hope and fear, spoke their natural language in her heart, and in her face. She could never be like those grand self-controlled creatures who meet grief or gladness with equal calm, whose proud features never betray by a single

quiver, whether hope has been crowned or buried in the heart beneath. Bessie had lost much of her girlish vanity and foolishness; but she had not gained the pride which bids away all outward show of feeling, and crushes down emotion beneath the iron bars of silence. Perhaps Roy loved her just as well without that pride, perhaps a little better.

Now that they were alone together, she could get a long look into his face and see how it was altered. Abigail Snarey, who had been married for two or three years to Barnie Wilson's son Jem, and whose spiteful ways plagued her husband as much as ever they had plagued poor Bessie, used to laugh at Roy when he whistled past that hammered glass window at the Aspens, and say that he was nothing but a big, pale-faced, overgrown lad, who had a trick of carrying his head a bit higher than other folks carried theirs. Abigail would not have the chance to say such an ill-natured thing as that again. Roy was a man now, every inch of him. Five years of South American sunshine had stained the face that used to be so fair. He seemed to have grown taller too, and broader; and his curling beard, hiding the once clear outline of lip and chin, gave him a foreign

appearance that almost puzzled Bessie, until she looked again into the blue eyes, whose straightforward, honest glance was just the same as ever. Bessie would have known him anywhere by that glance.

And they had so much to tell each other. Roy, of perils and dangers overpast, of strange adventures in that far off land, of sufferings and privations which had written their story on his face, fixing it into the steady, resolute expression of middle age; yet not taking away from it all the brightness or any of the loving tenderness of the old past time. He told her of that disastrous journey, of the fight with the natives, who came out in bands and roamed through the forests in search of settlers whom they might plunder. Then of his being taken prisoner, and living for four years in that rude village, teaching the natives European arts, treated kindly by them, but never suffered to go out of their sight, never seeing an English face, or hearing an English word. He might have been there now, Roy said, but for Mr. Rivers. It was Mr. Rivers who had caused the party of soldiers to be sent out, and made the natives give up their prisoner, and brought him back safely again to Rio, and then

paid his passage home ; promising that on his return, employment should be found for him on the Duke's foreign estates, or that if he stayed in England, his old place as foreman in the timber-yard should be given to him again. It was all Mr. Rivers.

Then came Bessie's story of hopes and fears, alternating through those first months of uncertainty ; afterwards of slow torturing suspense, which wore out all the freshness of youth, scarcely leaving even life itself. Then of the peace which came when all hope was dead ; how, having let go the thought of seeing Roy any more, she had been content to live a lonely life for his sake, waiting for heaven to give that which earth denied. Oh ! how strange it seemed to talk of all these things, now that they were quite past and done with. How the present gathered brightness from the gloomy past. How the memory of griefs and doubts that would never, never come between them any more, deepened the joy with which they looked into each other's faces, and learned each other's truth. Oh, that was a happy time !

When all was told, they sat still, hand in hand, heart to heart, silent but full of peace, the peace of perfect trust. Perhaps, instead of speaking

about the past, Roy had been thinking about it, for by and by he said,

“But it’s all over now, Bessie, and, please God, the deep sea shall never part us any more. Only there’s something else I ought to tell you.”

Roy paused as if that something else was hard to tell.

“There’s a good situation for me to go back to over yonder, Bessie. Mr. Rivers promised me it before I came away, and I shouldn’t be taken off either up and down the country as I was with that other gentleman who engaged me first. If I consider to take it, I shall have to start back pretty soon, so as to begin work at the back-end of the year. And I’m to let Mr. Rivers know by the first ship that sails whether I mean to go or not, because of getting some one else.”

There was another pause, in which Bessie longed so to say, “Stay, Roy,” but somehow she could not get the words said. He went on—

“Bessie, honey, I know it was a hard pull for you to promise to leave all and come along with me five years ago, and after all the trouble you’ve borne for my sake, I wouldn’t ask you to do it again. We’ll live in the old village, Bessie, if you like.

I'll speak to Mr. Andrews about getting me my place back in the Duke's yard. I've a letter from Mr. Rivers, and he said I only need give it to the clerk of the works, and there'd be my old place ready for me. And then I could take the cottage, and we would live same as we meant to do five years ago. Or, Bessie, dare you go right away back with me in six weeks? I mustn't stay longer than that. I won't leave you any more, Bessie. I said to myself a long time ago, that if ever I did come back again, and you hadn't forgotten me, nothing should ever part us any more. If you can't feel it right to go, I'll stay too. We'll keep together now, Bessie, come what will."

Bessie's hand did not fall from his as it had fallen before, when, that night under the elm trees of Meadowthorpe lane, Roy had first talked of going away beyond the sea. Then it seemed such a hard thing to leave the old home, even though he went with her; so hard to say good-bye to the old friends and the old scenes, knowing that she should look upon them no more. Now, she had learned that such parting as this is not the hardest in the world; that, for those who have faith in each other, every place is home.

Still, it would have been so pleasant to go back to Meadowthorpe, to the little cottage which Roy had got ready for her so long ago; to pass the rest of her days with him, a loved and loving wife, in the place where so many joys and sorrows had been lived through. Could she be so happy in any other place as in Meadowthorpe—dear, quiet little Meadowthorpe? Once more she had nearly said,

“Stay, Roy.”

But, looking into his face, she read there that he would rather go back. She felt that he could live a truer, freer life quite away from the old memories. And so she said, quietly enough, though far away down in her heart there might be a little touch of regret at leaving all,

“No, Roy, we won’t stay. I’ll go away with you to the new country. It’s home to me now, wherever you are, all the world over.”

And by the smile which lighted up Roy’s face then, and by the long close clasp in which he held her, Bessie knew that she had said the right thing.

Roy stayed at the old house in Wimpole Street all night, and for the next two or three days, until he had made arrangements for returning to Rio. Then he went away to Meadowthorpe, to stay there

with his father and mother until Bessie and her mistress came down. For Bessie was to be married in Meadowthorpe church, and the wedding party was to start from Miss Alwyne's cottage.

The next six weeks were busy weeks for Bessie. The *Columbia* was to sail on the tenth of May, and everything had to be ready a week before that time. The sheets and towels which had lain so long at the bottom of her trunk, those sheets and towels which Bessie thought would never be taken out any more until, perhaps, a dozen years hence, when she might have saved money enough to set up housekeeping for herself in that little cottage at Meadowthorpe, were unpacked and hemmed and marked and packed up again. And then there was the outfit to prepare, and the little bits of wedding finery to make, all done by Bessie's nimble fingers. And, oh! how those nimble fingers did fly over the work! Certainly she would have established a first-rate business as milliner and dressmaker at Meadowthorpe, if only things had not turned out so unexpectedly. If only——

Janita gave the wedding dress, and a very pretty dress it was, too, of white muslin, plain and neat, but as good as any lady need have wished to wear.

A great deal too good, as Mrs. Narrowby said when she saw it coming out of Miss Alwyne's cottage that first week in May. Ridiculous for a girl who would have all her own housework to do, to be married in a dress which was only fit for the parlour. A good useful gingham at fourpence a yard would have been much more consistent, Mrs. Narrowby thought.

But Janita was not quite sure that when Bessie got to Rio she would have all her own work to do. Roy had told her more about that situation upon the Duke's foreign property than he told Bessie. Perhaps he wanted to prepare a pleasant surprise for her when she got there. Perhaps he wished her to go with him all for love and nothing for reward, as, indeed, in her simple ignorance, she was going; content to toil with him as they would have toiled in that humble cottage at Meadowthorpe, never dreaming of any other life than that. Faithful, true-hearted Bessie Ashton. But, of course, Mrs. Narrowby knew nothing about the young people's prospects, she only knew that Bessie had lived housemaid at the Aspens, polishing spoons and cleaning windows upon wages of nine pounds a year. And white muslin was a most inconsistent

thing for parties of that kind to be married in.

It was on the twenty-second of March that Roy and Bessie found each other in the King's Cross station. On the fifth of May a very quiet little wedding party set out from Miss Alwyne's cottage to Meadowthorpe church. A very quiet little party indeed, for Bessie did not want to make a "sensation" in the village. She did not care now, as she would have cared six years ago, to dazzle the eyes of the village belles, and excite their envy by an unusually long procession, or an unwonted display of white ribbons and new gloves. The bride came first, led by Mr. Hastings, who was to give her away. Roy followed, with the head bridesmaid, Mary Hastings, Bessie's niece from St. Olave's. After them came Miss Alwyne's parlour-maid with the young man to whom she was going to be married some time, neither of them were quite sure when.

The Square people, who watched the wedding from their front windows, said that it was a very pretty one of its kind. The bridegroom held himself so nobly, the bride looked so modest and unassuming. Even Mrs. Narrowby was obliged to allow that the white muslin did not appear so very much out of place, and that it would have been a pity for so

sweet a face to have had any other ornament than the two or three orange buds which peeped out from under Bessie's bonnet. But she would not have allowed *her* housemaid to be married so.

Of course there was no ringing of bells, no rolling backwards and forwards of carriages, no scattering of flowers at the bride's feet by rows of children assembled for that purpose. There was plenty of sun though, pouring right cheerily down through the old stained glass windows upon Roy and Bessie as they stood together at the altar. Not winter sunshine at all; oh no, quite other than winter sunshine. And when they came out of the west door under the singing-gallery—that door where Roy had so often waited to get a glimpse of Bessie in years gone by—a gust of wind sweeping through the blossom-laden chestnut trees, spread upon the church-yard path a carpet of tiny white flowers soft enough for the daintiest satin-slippered feet to tread.

Abigail Snarey, now Mrs. Jem Wilson, stood at the gate to watch them out. Poor Abigail had not the sweetest life in the world. She was bad-tempered, and so was her husband, and between them both they generally managed to be in troubled

waters. She often sighed for the good old times when she lived cook at Miss Hepzibah's. She was sure she didn't know what people were thinking about to get married at all. She knew well enough, if only she had her freedom back, the best man alive would not make her give it up again. Abigail thought that if people could go apprentice to matrimony in the same way as they go apprentice to shoe-making, or any other trade, there would not be very many anxious to set up in business for themselves when the seven years were out. Marrying was a fine thing, a wonderful fine thing, so long as you looked at it on this side the church door; but it didn't do for a continuance. When a woman said "I will" at the altar, it was the last time she got a chance to say it at all. And Bessie would find that out before long, though she did look so pretty now in her white muslin frock and flowers inside her bonnet. For the men were all alike, find them where you would. Just made to plague the women, nothing else.

That was what the ex-plain cook of steady principles said, as she stood at the church-yard gate, watching Roy and Bessie come out arm-in-arm, over their chestnut-blossom carpet. And with

these somewhat desponding views of the matrimonial state, Mrs. Jem Wilson went home to get her husband's dinner ready.

Destiny Smith was there, too, waiting to set away the little boys and girls, and lock the church door. Destiny looked at the subject from a different point of view.

"Ah, well," he said, shaking his keys at a little three-year old lad who was pulling primroses on Professor Ruthven's grave, "it's a queer world, it is. I always did say that, and I always mean to. I never thought to see them two stand up man and wife together, and him as good as dead this six years back. But things as is to be will be, and things as isn't to be won't be. That there's my disposition and my religion, and folks may better it as can."

CHAPTER XXVII.



THESE things happened years ago. Meadowthorpe is very much improved now. People who are qualified to pass judgment in such matters, say it is the best managed estate in England. The village is drained on scientific principles. All the old farm-houses in Dykeland lordship are pulled down, and handsome new buildings, with the latest improvements, erected in their stead. So, also, are the mud hovels and pig-styes which used to form a pleasing diversity in the back roads. A person who had been away from Meadowthorpe twenty years, would scarcely know the place again. True, the dyke still rolls sleepily on, rocking the lily-leaves, and just stirring the great clusters of forget-me-nots which grow upon its sedgy banks. And the slant sunlight of July evenings still threads in and out amongst the tall

flag-leaves, and in Autumn time the fog comes creeping up over Dykeland marsh, stained with red and purple from the western sky. The grey pollard-willows, too, stretch in unbroken lines from field to field, and the elm tree avenue that leads up from the village gates, still affords superior family accommodation to numerous colonies of rooks, who set up housekeeping there from year to year, and caw just as busily as in the old, old time, when Noelline Rivers used to listen to them. These things are unchanged. But all the new cottages are finished now, pretty little cottages, with stone porches, and high, sloping roofs; not so good for sketching purposes as the old thatched tenements, but much more convenient for christianised people who have to live a godly, sober, and righteous life, within them. And the chestnut trees along the Muchmarsh road have grown until their branches almost meet over head, and that great tract of waste land beyond the mill-slip, which Mr. Rivers, when he first came to the estate, parcelled out amongst the Duke's men for cottage gardens, is just one many-coloured mass of flowers and foliage; quite a picture to look at, as those say who knew it in its desolate, unreclaimed condition.

Yes, little Meadowthorpe has quite turned over a new leaf. It looks so healthy and wholesome and well-conducted. Just like a little boy who has got his best clothes on, and his face washed, ready for afternoon Sunday school. Miss Hepzibah *would* say, "Blessings on us!" if she could see Meadowthorpe again. But Miss Hepzibah never will see Meadowthorpe again. She has left her pickling and preserving, and joined brother Jabez in the far-off land where these things are no longer needed.

"And it's all along of the new steward, bless him!" as the old women say, standing over their washtubs, in neat little back yards, or black-leading the most compact of kitchen ranges, or baking short cakes in ovens which "draw" with uniform steadiness. "It's all along of the new steward, bless him! that things is done so beautiful and convenient. We might ha' been scratching on yet in them thatched sheds, with never a bit o' back yard to dry a few clothes in, or side things out at cleaning times, and not so much as a shelf to set a sup o' milk on, if Mr. Rivers, bless him! hadn't been 'lected steward to the place, and gived hisself to it to make it decent. It's a vast this lordship has to thank Mr. Rivers for, it is. And it's small

gratitude them has as doesn't say their prayers for him every night o' their lives, and him laying himself out for the good of the people as he does, bless him!"

Which oft-repeated thankfulness is by no means uncalled for. Gavin Rivers has returned from Rio now, and spends nearly all his time in planning and superintending improvements on the estate. He was away three years. At the end of that time workmen were sent into the Hall. The weed-cumbered garden was restored to its pristine beauty. The bronzes were unwrapped, the family plate brought back from St. Olave's bank. Once more the Misses Vere Aubrey made little peep-holes with their parasols in the laurel-hedge, through which they saw carpenters and plasterers running to and fro, men putting up curtains, and laying down carpets, and marshalling into their respective places the beautiful old carved oak chairs and cabinets which had so long been confined in deal packing cases. Something of importance must be going to happen. The clerk of the works said Mr. Rivers was expected back in a few weeks. Gentility Square said that perhaps he would bring a new bride with him from over the seas.

Mr. Rivers did nothing of the sort. He came

back as he went, a widower. Not quite so stern, perhaps, as in the old time, but sad, rather, and thoughtful still. Very retired, too, in his habits. Not at all disposed to "drop in" at Gablehouse as Mrs. Narrowby so very kindly pressed him to do whenever he felt lonely up there at the Hall. Mrs. Narrowby thought he must feel so very lonely up there, especially in an evening, and it would give them all such pleasure to see him in a quiet way, with no ceremony, just like one of their own family. But Mr. Rivers never went. Neither did he ever join in a rubber with Mrs. Macturk, and the Misses Vere Aubrey, any of whom would have made him a most suitable wife; nor did he accept Mrs. Mabury's cordial invitations to take a knife and fork at the Rectory when Emily Graham chanced to be staying there. Instead, he would sit alone amongst his bronzes and family portraits, sometimes having Mr. Andrews in for an hour or two, sometimes giving a state dinner party, at which there was always the best of soups and the choicest of wines, but never anything marked in his attentions to the eligible ladies who might be present. On the whole, Gentility Square was very much disappointed with the manner in which Mr. Rivers

conducted himself during the first year after his return from South America.

I said he looked sad when he came back to the old home. It was the sadness of a man who has toiled through gloom, but not yet reached the sunlight; the sadness of a man, who, though no longer vexed by evil memories, has not yet won sure, abiding peace. Mr. Rivers does not look sad now.

The nightingales, who sing nowhere more sweetly than at Meadowthorpe, trill their earliest summer song in the branches of a whitethorn tree which overhangs a stone slab in the churchyard. In winter time the snow flakes lie whitely upon it, in autumn the brown leaves cover it, in May and June it is hidden by a fall of blossoms from the thorn tree. Pushing these aside, you may read the inscription—

“GERTRUDE ALWYNE, AGED 47.”

She died very suddenly, God letting her cross with a single step that dark river over which so many weary in toil and pain before they reach sweet rest on the other side. She went about amongst the poor people up to the very last, neither faltering step nor paling cheek showing that the end was so near. But one day, when the Janu-

ary winds came sweeping over Meadowthorpe marshes, and snow-drifts hid all the churchyard graves, people whispered to each other, with hushed sad voices, that Miss Alwyne was dead, dead in the night. There were many tears for her in the village, from those whose needs she had supplied, from those who had clasped her hand and been stilled by the look of her calm face. But none mourned her more truly than those who far-off had known her only by the influence of her written words.

So for Miss Alwyne all is over at last. All suffering, whatever that suffering may have been. Down below, the grave, with its pall of May flowers whitening in the sunshine. Up above, the rest and the glory, and the quietness, for ever.

The Square keeps up its respectability in just the old way, though time has worked a few changes even there. Miss Vere Aubrey wears a false front now, and occasionally stays away from the working party, because, as she says, Mrs. Narrowby's needles are so inferior. They are made with such very small eyes. Miss Matilda dyes her hair, or if she does not dye it, it darkens perceptibly with advancing years. But that may be a little peculiarity incident to Norman descent. Mrs. Macturk gives

her grand entertainments as usual. Mrs. Maguire has a quadrille party now and then and a full-blown ball at Christmas. Mrs. Colonel Gore has not been to the Hall for a very long time. She finds that the air of Meadowthorpe does not suit her now. But Miss Vere Aubrey hears from her occasionally. She writes sweetly charming letters, so very affectionate and full of sympathy. From time to time some of the Close people, who go up to town during the season, meet her at a ball or fashionable evening party, and they say that she is beautiful as ever, *so* elegant and graceful, quite the darling of society. And she often inquires so kindly after dear little Meadowthorpe. She says she can never forget dear little Meadowthorpe.

Gentility Square and Commonalty Row still meet at the working party in Mrs. Narrowby's drawing-room. There they unite in making shirts and stitching little pinafores, acknowledging each other as "fellow-Christians," met to advance the cause, linked by Mr. Mabury in his closing prayer as "co-workers" and "faithful handmaids." And, according to old established usage, Gentility Square passes Commonalty Row next morning, with a blank unrecognising stare, "because, you know, it is such a nuisance to have to move to such people

in the street. Now, do you not think that moving to such people in the street is a nuisance?"

Of course it is, and Gentility Square wisely abstains from doing it.

There has been no wedding from Gablehouse yet, and people begin to think there never will be. The three Misses Narrowby continue the three Misses Narrowby. They behave with beautiful propriety. The Misses Narrowby would not do anything improper for the world. Neither would their brother Longden, who still lives at home unmarried. Mrs. Narrowby wishes he would settle. She thinks young men are so very much better settled, that is, when they can meet with wives who can help them to establish a position. But Mrs. Narrowby objects very much to young men entangling themselves when there is no immediate prospect of housekeeping. And so she always counsels prudence when Longden mentions pretty Miss Seton of the Aspens. For pretty Miss Seton's fortune does not come to her until after her mamma's death, and Mrs. Seton is a person not far past the prime of life. Indeed, it is very possible she may marry again herself, and then where would the fortune be, supposing it is not safely settled

upon the children, which Mrs. Narrowby fears is not the case. Poor Longden! his prospects are very hazy. Most likely he will remain a bachelor to the end of his days.

Roy writes sometimes to the steward of Meadowthorpe. Bessie has never repented going away with him to that far-off country. Wherever Roy is, that place is home to her still; no other place like it. Nothing but death will part them any more now.

Roy holds the situation which Mr. Rivers used to occupy on the Esperita property. A great advance for him, but he fills his post well, and has made a man of himself at last. People say that if anything happened to the present steward, Roy would be sent for to manage the Dykeland lordship. I think, and most likely you think so too, that if he were sent for, he would not come. For Roy has the pride which cannot bear a cold suspicious look. Not even the Hall and the stewardship would ever tempt him back to Meadowthorpe, so long as there was a single person in the place who refused to clasp hands with him as an honest, innocent man.

Poor old Mr. and Mrs. Royland are dead. So

is Mrs. Cloudie. Abigail keeps on scolding her husband. He keeps on scolding her. When neither of them can think of anything more to say, he goes to the publichouse and she sits down and wonders why she was ever such a simpleton as to "get wed." She wouldn't do it again, she knows, if anything was to happen to Jem.

Canon Hewlet lives in Miss Alwyne's cottage. It is thought likely that Mr. Mabury will leave the Rectory soon, for preferment in St. Olave's. If so, every one says the living will be offered to the Canon. If he accepts it, Meadowthorpe will have need to be thankful. But though they do not call him their pastor yet, Dr. Hewlet preaches to the people daily by that holy Christ-like life of his, which is grander far than any sermon could ever be.

Janita is at Meadowthorpe now; home again once more amongst its grey pollard-willow trees, its level reaches of marsh and meadow land, its sedgy banks where the bulrushes grow and the sentinel herons stand watching for their prey. Janita does not often write. God has given her other work to do. Little children climb upon her knees. Baby lips are pressed to hers for kisses; baby eyes look into her face for the mother smile which shall charm away all tears. If sometimes she goes into

that quiet room where once poor Mrs. Rivers used to dream away her life, goes there to knit up a little story or poem, or add one chapter to the new book that grows so very, very slowly, pattering footsteps are heard along the corridor and merry voices call for "mamma." And when mamma, who never sends the little ones away, opens the door for them, a perfect chorus of supplications is poured forth.

"Oh, mamma! a story, *do* tell us a story. Like the one you told us yesterday, mamma. Just one. *Do*, mamma."

Mamma does tell them one, and then another, and then another, amidst shouts of laughter, or perhaps when the sorrowful parts come, amidst deep stillness, broken only by a sigh now and then from little Nyta, the oldest girl. When the sobs come, mamma finishes up the story in a hurry and begins another, a fairy tale, which brings the sunshine back and makes the little ones laugh more loudly than ever.

"Oh, mamma, is it your own, and did you make it all yourself? How nice it must be to make stories! Mamma, isn't it very nice to make stories?"

Mamma does not tell them whether it is very nice to make stories or not, but she sends them away back into the garden, and by and by their merry

laughter is heard as they scamper up and down the laurel-walk or dance round the fountain-pond.

That is in the day-time, when the new steward is riding over the lordship, planning those improvements for which the old women bless him so heartily, and superintending the draining operations which, before many years have passed, will double the value of the Dykeland estate to its owner. At night, when all is still, when the patter of children's footsteps is hushed, when the rosy lips have breathed their evening prayer, and the restless little hands are folded in slumber, Gavin Rivers and Janita, true husband now and true wife, sit together by their own fireside, thanking God for the rest and the beauty and the sweetness which fill their life. Thanking Him, too, not more for present peace than for those by-gone years of toil through which He guided them home at last.

For if there is a sorrow which only great souls can know, so there is no joy like that which God gives to those who, having walked patiently through gloom and sadness, come out at last into the broad, beautiful sunshine of His love.

THE END.

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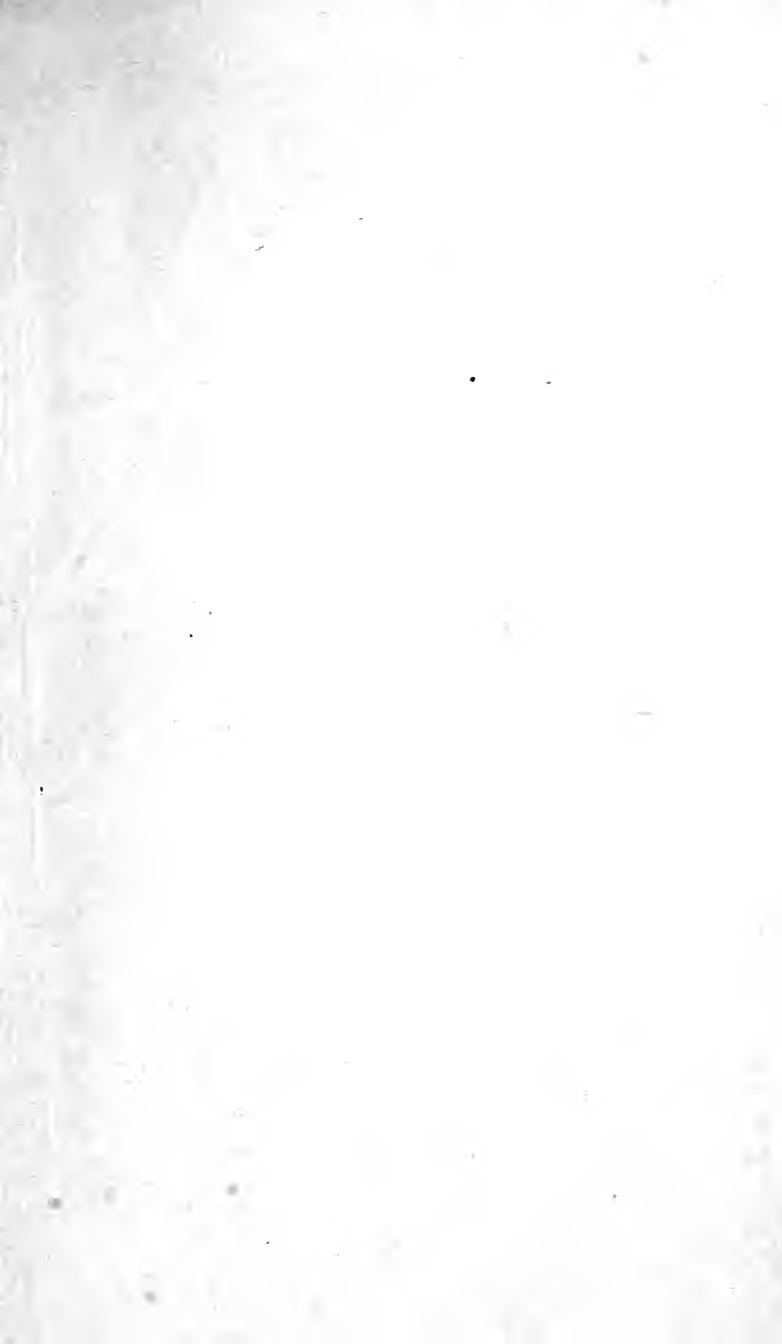
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